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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for increasing motivation in writing that will enhance students' skills at a variety of grade levels. The targeted population consisted of first, second, and third grade classes as well as ninth through twelfth grade Learning Disabled students in a Midwestern state. The evidence of lack of motivation was documented by parent surveys, student surveys, teacher surveys and observations. Probable cause data showed students are unmotivated to write due to low self confidence, lack of control over writing tasks, inadequate amount of time to expand on writing pieces, lack of emphasis on organizers, limited peer collaboration, and insufficient relevance to real life. Faculty reported lack of student motivation in writing tasks which hinder writing achievement. State data showed a decline in writing scores at the targeted sites. A review of solution strategies resulted in an action plan that included activities which incorporated student choices, relevance, moderately challenging tasks and collaboration with peers. Teacher instruction was guided by these points and included modeling, adequate time for completion of writing activities, use of graphic organizers, relevant writing tasks, pen pal correspondences and writing throughout the curriculum. The research concluded with a final survey to students and parents which showed an overall average increase in students' attitudes towards writing and an increase in students' organizational skills in writing tasks. Although the goal was to increase motivation, and the researchers feel this did occur, it is difficult to measure using data. For this reason, no substantial conclusions can be derived regarding the exact amount of motivational impact on each student. The paper contains 44 references and 10 figures of data. Appendixes contain parent, teacher, and student survey instruments; a pen pal activity reflection; and permission letters. (Author/RS)

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INCREASING MOTIVATION TO WRITE BY ENHANCING SELF-PERCEPTION, UTILIZING COLLABORATION, MODELING AND RELEVANCE

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This report describes a program for increasing motivation in writing that will enhance students' skills at a variety of grade levels. The targeted population consisted of first, second, and third grade classes as well as ninth through twelfth grade Learning Disabled students in a Midwestern state. The evidence of lack of motivation was documented by parent surveys, student surveys, teacher surveys and observations.

Probable cause data showed students are unmotivated to write due to low self confidence, lack of control over writing tasks, inadequate amount of time to expand on writing pieces, lack of emphasis on organizers, limited peer collaboration, and insufficient relevance to real life. Faculty reported lack of student motivation in writing tasks which hinder writing achievement. State data showed a decline in writing scores at the targeted sites.

A review of solution strategies resulted in an action plan that included activities which incorporated student choices, relevance, moderately challenging tasks and collaboration with peers. Teacher instruction was guided by these points and included modeling, adequate time for completion of writing activities, use of graphic organizers, relevant writing tasks, pen pal correspondences and writing throughout the curriculum.

The research concluded with a final survey to students and parents which showed an overall average increase in students' attitudes towards writing and an increase in students' organizational skills in writing tasks. Although the goal was to increase motivation, and the researchers feel this did occur, it is difficult to measure using data. For this reason, no substantial conclusions can be derived regarding the exact amount of motivational impact on each student.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Students of the targeted first, second, and third grade classes, as well as a class of high school Learning Disabled (LD) students exhibit a lack of intrinsic motivation that negatively impacts their writing performance. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes low achievement scores on state standardized writing tests, low district writing theme test scores, report cards, teacher observations, and surveys from students, teachers, and parents.

Immediate Problem Context

In the reporting that follows, the targeted classrooms will be referred to as Classrooms A, B, C, and D, which are housed in three different buildings referred to as Sites A, B, and C within the same school district.

Site A

Site A currently has an enrollment of 361 students. Student racial and ethnic backgrounds consist of 80.3% White, 13.6% Black, 4.7% Hispanic, and 1.4% Asian/Pacific Islander. Low income households constitute 35.2% of the total population. Limited-English-Proficient constitutes 0.6% of the student population. The site does not have a chronic truancy problem (0.0%), and has an attendance rate of 95.6%. The mobility rate is 13.7% (School Report Card, 1999).

Twenty full time teachers and three part-time teachers are employed. There are three teachers per grade level K-5. There is also one full-time Behavior Disorder teacher who has two full time aides. Grades K-3 have eight full-time certified instructional aides in the classrooms for at least three hours per day. Eight specialist teachers are employed who teach students in grades 1-5, and one special class per day (physical education, art, music, learning center) for 45 minutes. The school also employs a computer consultant who provides instruction on a rotating basis among all grade levels. Office personnel include one administrator and two secretaries. The school also employs two full-time custodians, one part-time nurse, and six food service workers (School Report Card, 1999).

Fifty-seven percent of the faculty have obtained bachelor's degrees. Master's degrees are held by 39% of the faculty. One faculty member holds an Educational Specialist Degree. Professional teaching experience ranges from one year to thirty-one years. The faculty is composed of 82% female employees and 18% male employees. Ethnicity of the faculty is 100% White. The pupil-teacher ratio is 19:1, with an average class size of 20 (School Report Card, 1999).

Standardized test scores in the area of writing continue to decline at Site A, particularly at the third grade level. Those students who were on the academic warning list, or did not meet expectations for third grade for the 2000 school year, comprised 44% of those tested at Site A. Those meeting expectations comprised 50% of the population, while those exceeding only comprised 6% of the population. As a district 42% were either on the academic warning list or did not meet standards. Comparatively, 55% of the district met standards, while only 2% exceeded those standards (Standards Achievement Test, 2000).

Site A offers an environment in which students can grow academically, while developing self-discipline and responsibility. Faculty recognize that their students come to school with a

variety of individual learning styles and experiential backgrounds. Working cooperatively with parents and community, faculty attempts to accommodate this diversity by utilizing a high degree of flexibility (Mission Statement).

Site A was built in 1969 with an area of 40,607 square feet. It was built in three wings, with reflecting architecture suited for the open classroom. These wings, known as pods, contain six classrooms. Pod classrooms have walls and no doors. Pod A houses grades three and four, while Pod B houses grades one and two, and Pod C houses Kindergarten and grade five. In addition to these Pods, there is an art room, a learning center, a computer lab containing 22 computers, and a music room. A gymnasium also serves as a cafeteria and auditorium. One large room is used for the district's behavior disordered classroom for grades four and five. The offices for the administrator, secretaries, and nurse are located in the main hallway. Six small rooms double as storage rooms and classrooms for the following activities: tutorial help, student counseling, speech therapy, book binding, and learning disabled instruction. One small room next to the music room serves as a teachers' lounge.

Programs currently in place at the school include Rising Stars Tutoring, Positive Alternative for Latchkey Students (PALS), a breakfast program, Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), the Area Vocational Center Program, Boys' and Girls' Choirs, Outreach, college tutors, Boys' and Girls' Fifth Grade Basketball, Family Reading Nights, Adopt-A-School, Detention/ Noon Working, County Area Project, Can-Do Attitude, Readermania, Young Authors' Program and Drug Awareness Resistance Education (DARE).

Rising Stars Tutoring program is coordinated by the district high school and supervised by an adult. It meets twice weekly after school for 45 minutes. Teachers identify one student per classroom, grades one through three, who will benefit the most from tutoring. Students are paired with local high school tutors.

PALS is a program that is sponsored by the local YMCA. Local elementary schools provide facilities for school age child care before and after school hours. Children are offered a safe, supervised place to stay. They interact with one another and learn from visits by special guests.

The school breakfast program is partially funded by the state. Children receive a hot, nutritious breakfast before school. The program feeds approximately 60 children each morning.

The PTO is an active group of parents and teachers who discuss issues and brainstorm solutions to problems. Funds raised allow the faculty to purchase items for classroom use. These funds provide books for the learning center, equip the computer lab with computers and software, and construct a handicapped accessible playground.

The Area Vocational Center Program provides an opportunity for high school child care students to work with elementary age children and apply classroom lessons. The high school students spend ten and a half hours working with elementary classes four days weekly. The fifth day is spent in classroom lessons. The high school students are responsible for presenting at least one project per quarter.

Boys' and Girls' Choir is open to all students in fourth and fifth grade. Choir meets before and after school. Students perform for different populations in the community, as well as other area schools.

Outreach is a counseling program available for students having social or emotional problems. The Outreach worker meets with at-risk students on a regular basis to develop coping strategies for school and life. The Outreach worker monitors attendance and makes home visits to address truancy problems or other areas of concern.

College tutors volunteer to work twice weekly with at-risk students. Tutors work with students on homework. They also help to review material from classes.

Basketball teams are organized for the fifth grade girls and boys. Games are played between elementary schools in the city. Sportsmanship and team building are emphasized.

Family Reading Nights are an evening event that encourages everyone to read. A theme is selected by the teachers. During the evening teachers share a book and an activity with students and parents.

The Adopt-A-School Program involves area businesses. It is designed to link the business world with education. Sponsors support the school through donations. In return, teachers create bulletin boards for the business entry, and students write letters of thanks for their support.

Detention and Noon Working are two programs designed to address behavior and academic concerns. Detentions are scheduled after school twice weekly. Detentions are assigned to students for serious behavior problems or chronic late work. Noon Working is a program for students who do not complete their homework or classroom work in a timely manner. Students may use Noon Working as a study hall.

County Area Project sponsors skating parties, swim days and swimming lessons for the students. Students skate or swim at a reduced rate. The majority of the cost is absorbed by County Area Project.

The Can-Do Attitude Program is sponsored by the Building Improvement Team. Tickets that say Can-Do are issued to teachers. Students are given the tickets for exhibiting positive behavior or attitude. Students accumulate tickets to purchase items at the Can Do Store once a quarter. Purchases of different values may include baseball cards, pens, papers, disposable cameras and cookies. Students may save tickets to use the following quarter.

Readermania involves fourth and fifth graders. Students are encouraged to read from a core list of books. They are asked questions to check for understanding of each book, and

achievement is charted. Students must read a required number of books from the core list to qualify for the district Readermania Contest. All elementary schools are represented at the contest. Using a quiz show format, a final winner is declared .

A program designed to encourage writing is called Young Authors. Students in grades K-5 participate by writing fiction, non-fiction stories, or poetry to be judged by the classroom teacher. Winners are selected and sent on to the district level. First through fourth places are awarded for each building. The first place winner is invited to attend the state Young Authors' Conference where the students have the opportunity to meet other young authors and published authors.

DARE involves the area police department. DARE officers work directly with schools to educate students in preventing substance abuse. This program targets third and fifth graders. Weekly lessons are implemented with an end of the year graduation ceremony involving students, teachers, and parents.

Classroom A, known in the school as A-1, is housed in Pod A. Classroom A, grade three, is the first classroom on the left side of the pod. A large open doorway leads into a classroom that contains 20 student desks arranged in groups of four and five, a teacher's desk, and two conference tables. A computer station is set up on a conference table. Not far from the computer is the class pet, a guinea pig. Several bookcases frame a reading area and coat closet, which has open storage cubby holes for student supplies. The back wall of the classroom is magnetic and holds several reference charts and posters. Below the chalkboard are student/teacher-created brainstorming webs and other prompts for classroom activities. The front wall of the classroom is almost completely filled by a chalkboard. There are two small bulletin boards and one large bulletin board. A small counter and sink area are located at the back of the room.

A language arts instructional block is taught for 120 minutes. Instruction includes reading, writing and spelling. Math, science, and social studies are taught as core subjects, with writing integrated within each area. Core subject instruction averages approximately 55 minutes, with science and social studies taught on an alternating basis. Students receive daily classroom instruction a total of 4 hours and 45 minutes. Students attend a "special" (physical education, art, learning center and music) 45 minutes per day. A 35-minute lunch period and a 15-minute recess are also provided each day.

A classroom aide works with at-risk students daily for approximately three hours. They support the curriculum through repetition and drill. A student aide from the local college tutors one student twice a week for a total of one hour.

Classroom B, known in the school as B-4, is housed in Pod B. Classroom B, grade one, is the last classroom on the right side of the Pod. A large open doorway leads into a classroom that consists of 25 student desks that are arranged in pairs. Desks are centered in the room. The perimeter of the room consists of various centers: Math Center, Listening Center, Writing Center, Computer Center, Reading Corner, and Calendar/Sharing Corner. Manipulatives and math games fill up two tables in the Math Center. Located next to the Math Center is a small table with five stations that make up the Listening Center. To the right is the Reading Corner with a bookcase and a rug. The Writing Center is a conference table filled with writing supplies. In the front of the room, a computer and software are located in the Computer Center. The remainder of the room's perimeter includes the Calendar/Sharing Corner, which consists of a rocking chair and a small student bench. A teacher's desk, file cabinet, and aide's desk separate the centers. The front wall of the classroom holds a chalkboard and three bulletin boards. The back wall is magnetic with one bulletin board. Bright charts, graphic organizers, and students'

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works are splattered throughout this print rich classroom. Two clothesline-like wires stretch from the front to the back walls for displaying charts, graphic organizers, and student work.

Language arts, math, science, and social studies are taught thematically. Each week a theme is addressed which incorporates all subject areas. Students receive daily classroom instruction for a total of 4 hours and 45 minutes. They attend a 45 minute special period daily (physical education, art, learning center and music). A 35 minute lunch period and a 15 minute recess are also provided each day.

Support for individual students in Classroom B comes from a variety of sources. A classroom aide delivers small group instruction and support for three hours daily. For college credit three students from the local college volunteer to work with at-risk students for a combined total of five hours a week. Four parent volunteers each tutor one hour weekly to work with students who are struggling academically.

Site B

The targeted school is a K-5 accelerated elementary school located in a small Mid-western community on the western edge of town. A consensus was reached to become a charter member of the State Network of Accelerated Schools in 1989. Accelerated Schools believe in shared decision-making, unity of purpose, and building on strengths to accelerate students to grade level. The vision statement affirms the following: a place where students, staff, parents, and community work together as a nurturing and supportive family; a school in which teaching and learning are valued as the most important part of our mission; a place where the whole school family is encouraged to become responsible and develop strong moral character; and a school which provides physical facilities large enough to support the growing needs of our community. The targeted areas are met through this mission statement: a community of students, staff, and families, exists for the purpose of preparing children for the future. With high academic

expectations, we accelerate learning. In an atmosphere of positive support and respect, we build on each child's strengths. The mission is to foster an educational environment where honesty, peace, and politeness are valued. The mission and vision statements are representative of the input which was received from students, staff, parents, and community. Accelerated Schools operate through cadres that identify challenge areas, which report to a steering committee (School Improvement Plan, 2000).

Over the past thirteen years, the targeted school's student enrollment has remained remarkably consistent, with a high of 426 students in 1987 to a low of 366 students in 1997. The current enrollment is 375 students. Site B has experienced consistently high mobility (31.7%) of students from year to year. Student attendance is 94.5% with chronic truancy at 2.5%. There has been a gradual increase of low-income families (55.9%). Evidence of this is reflected through more than half of the students qualifying for free or reduced lunches. The ethnic diversity of student population has remained consistent over the past 13 years, with about one-quarter of our students coming from minority groups. As reported in the school report card, the percentages are as follows: White 75.2%, Black 19.3%, Hispanic 5.3%, and Asian/Pacific Islander 0.3%. The school's community views this diversity, both economics and ethnic, as both a strength and a challenge (School Improvement Plan, 2000, School Report Card, 1998).

The staff consists of three classroom teachers per grade level for K-5, 4 Title I teachers, 1 Outreach worker, 8 fine arts teachers, 12 teacher aides, 6 cafeteria workers, 2 custodians, 2 secretaries, 1 speech therapist, 1 part time psychologist, 1 part-time social worker, and 1 building administrator. The ethnicity of the staff is 94% White and 6% Black. Gender composition is 89% female and 11% male. Staff members possessing bachelor's degrees constitute 74%, and 26% hold master's degrees. The average class size is approximately 22.6 students per classroom instructor (School Improvement Plan, 2000).

Standardized tests are given at third and fifth grade levels in the content areas of reading, writing, and math. The school writing scores reflect a gradual decline over the past four consecutive years. Third graders who did not meet state goals rose from 15% in 1996 to the current 59% in 2000 (Standards Achievement Test 2000, School Improvement Plan 2000).

The targeted school is a federally funded Title I site. Title teachers provide a variety of services, which are comprised of both pull out and inclusion. Numerous programs are offered to the entire student body: Member of the Accelerated Schools Network, Outreach, Public Aid Truancy Initiative, DARE, Rising Stars Tutoring, Boys' and Girls' Performing Choirs, PALS, Polite/Peace/Honesty Is Right, School Breakfast Program, Family Nights, Boys'/Girls' Fifth Grade Basketball Teams, and Area Vocational Center Program (School Report Card, 1998, School Improvement Plan, 2000).

The Public Aid Truancy Initiative is a program designed to keep students in school. Basically, the program works because the parents' public aid money is withheld if the students have too many unexcused absences. Withholding public aid is an effective consequence for truancy.

A trio of programs were initiated due to student need. The Polite/Peace/Honesty Is Right programs were developed by staff members, parents, and students to address various social issues. Each grade level was assigned one of the programs to provide direct instruction. However, all of the programs have been incorporated into the daily curriculum throughout the year.

A variety of family nights have been developed around the content areas of language arts and math/science. Family nights occur once a month throughout the school calendar year. The planning is done prior to the beginnng if school year. Then, at registration parents are provided with a calendar of educational activities involving the family.

Site B was built in 1967 with an area of 40,607 square feet. The building is arranged with three pods containing six classrooms, each branching off from a centrally located office and learning center. Numerous small storage rooms have been converted into workable student centers. The gym serves dual purpose as a cafeteria and physical education facility. In 1995 this facility established a full computer lab thus enhancing student learning through modern technology. Site B is continuously challenged with meeting the spatial needs of a diverse learning community (District Facility Study, 1999).

Classroom D is a second grade classroom in the southwest side of the pod, located at the end of the hallway. The classroom has two floor-to-ceiling windows which are three feet in width, one sink, three file cabinets, two storage closets, one large bookcase, one chalkboard, one dry erase board, two bulletin boards, five open coat rack bends, two rectangular tables, a maximum of twenty-five student desks, and one teacher desk. Assortments of small tables are dispersed throughout the room to enhance the learning area. When entering the classroom, visitors are immersed with an abundance of print exposure placed strategically throughout the room. Desks are arranged in a matter that is conducive to cooperative learning and team building activities. The classroom operates a "no door" policy, referring to the fact that the room does not have a door, and all visitors are welcome anytime. Open spaces are provided to allow students to be creative and relaxed with the learning experiences. A variety of centers are organized throughout the room which support the topics and concepts presented weekly. Centers consist of a student computer, science lab, listening area, creative art table, and writing center. There is a medley of books dispersed about the room to assure exposure in different genres. Life sciences are addressed throughout the year with a fish aquarium and a pet mouse. Students also have storage cubicles to maintain organization of daily folders and additional school

supplies for fine arts classes. Overall, the classroom provides an aesthetically pleasing environment to address the learning styles of every child.

The content areas of language arts, math, science, social studies, and health are taught throughout the day using an integrated theme approach. Themes are taught over a two to four week time span. The day is divided into blocks of 45 minutes to an hour for direct instruction, allowing ample time for practice. Students receive daily classroom instruction for a total of 4 hours and 45 minutes. A fine arts (physical education, art, learning center, music) period is provided daily for students consisting of a 45 minute block allowing for teacher collaboration and planning. A daily 35 minute lunch period and a 15 minute recess are also provided.

Site C

Site C is a public high school serving grades nine through twelve. The school's total enrollment is 1,483. The total enrollment is comprised of 85.9% White, 9.0% Black, 3.7% Hispanic, and 1.3% Asian/Pacific Islander. The percentage of low-income students at Site C is 26.6%. The mobility rate is 6.9%. The chronic truancy rate is 12%, with 166 students considered chronically truant. The attendance rate is 91.1%. The dropout rate is 8.1%, and the graduation rate is 73.2%. The average class size is 17, and the student to teacher ratio is 16:1 (School Report Card, 1999).

There are 113 certified staff . There are 101 teachers, 5 administrators, 5 counselors, 1 dean, 1 full-time nurse, and 1 student assistance employee. The certified educational staff is composed of 57.4% female and 42.6% male. The educational staff is composed of 94.3% White, 4.1% Black, 1.3% Hispanic, and 0.3% Asian/Pacific Islander. The average teaching experience is 16 years. Educational staff with a bachelor's degree is 66.3%. The percentage of staff with a master's degree or beyond is 33.7%. Additional staff includes 18 food service employees, 11 clerical employees, 10 teacher aides, and 10 custodians (Building Report, 1998-1999).

Writing scores on state achievement tests reflect a decline in 10th grade writing scores over the past three years. In addition, school writing scores have been consistently lower than the average state writing scores. In 1998, 56% of the students tested did not meet state goals for learning in the area of writing. Students who met state goals comprise 31% of the total number of students tested. Only 13% of the students exceeded state writing goals. In the same year, the percentage of students within the state who did not meet state goals for learning in the area of writing was 42%. The percentage of students who met state goals was 37%, while the percentage of students who exceeded the state goals for learning in the area of writing was 21% (School Report Card, 1999).

Site C is a two story brick building which was built in 1959. It is located on 80 acres of land. An addition was added to the building in 1969 which provided the existing facility with a learning center, 3 lecture rooms, and 11 classrooms. A new building which houses a gym and swimming pool was built behind the main building in 1993. There are 85 classrooms, an auditorium which seats 2,340, a 3,500 seat gym, and a cafeteria which is capable of providing lunch to the entire student body.

The typical day is comprised of six class periods. Each class period is 55 minutes in length. In addition to the six instructional periods, students have a 25 minute advisory period and a 25 minute lunch each day.

Site C provides students with many programs. The intent of these programs is to meet the individual needs of its students. These include the Police Liaison Program, the Area Vocational Center, the Teen Parenting Program, the Work Experience Program, and the Peer Mediation Program.

The Police Liaison Program is a partnership between Site C and the city police department. Throughout the school year, the Police Liaison Officer provides protection for

students and staff. Additionally, the officer is available for lecturing, counseling, and advising students on topics regarding law enforcement.

An Area Vocational Center offers a variety of courses designed to prepare students for specific careers. These courses combine classroom instruction with hands-on experience. Students from five other area high schools participate in this program.

The Teen Parenting Program offers teen parents the opportunity to stay in school. Students enrolled in this program are enrolled in courses which focus on parenting skills and plans for the future. Transportation and child care are provided. Students have the opportunity to visit their children at specific times during the school day.

The Work Experience Program is a resource for 14 and 15 year old, at-risk students. The goal of the program is to keep students in school by showing them the connection between education and employment. Students earn academic credit for classroom instruction and actual work experience in the community.

The Peer Mediation Program offers students the opportunity to discuss problems with other students. Peer Mediators have been trained in conflict resolution strategies. These strategies assist students in social interactions.

Educational opportunities are provided for all students. This includes students planning to pursue post-secondary education, students who have learning and/or physical disabilities, and students who have specific areas of interest such as fine arts, technology and vocational preparation. According to the school's mission statement, "as a partnership of students, staff, and community, the school seeks to provide all students with equal opportunity to achieve academic, physical and vocational success in a caring, safe environment" (Building Report, 1998-1999).

A wide variety of student activities are offered. There are ten competitive sports for both male and female athletes. Various organizations such as foreign language clubs, student government, service to others, theater, and student publications target the students' interest areas.

Classroom C is located on the second floor. Windows along the length of the north wall face the school's inner courtyard. The room is shared by two teachers. The classroom contains 13 student desks arranged in rows, 3 file cabinets, 2 teacher desks located on opposite sides of the classroom, 2 study carrels, 1 conference table and 1 smaller table. A computer station with a color laser printer is located on the south wall of the classroom. The classroom is also equipped with an overhead projector, a television, and a VCR. Several units of shelves filled with instructional materials are located throughout the classroom. A bulletin board near the computer station illustrates current units of study.

An English curriculum is taught in 55 minute class periods to students with specific learning disabilities. The curricular focus is on exploring spelling, reading, writing, listening and speaking skills through the use of literature and forms of daily communication such as newspapers. The importance of study skills is also addressed.

The Surrounding Community

The district's mission statement affirms the following: As a partnership of students, staff, and community, we will focus our resources on creating a caring environment which empowers all students to develop their fullest potential and become productive, socially responsible, life-long learners." The community public school system is a unit district, with grades prekindergarten through twelve. One primary building houses the district's prekindergarten and Head Start programs. There are seven elementary buildings (K-5), two middle school buildings (6-8), one high school (9-12) and one off-campus school for high school

age at-risk students. Only two of the elementary schools did not qualify for Title I funds. Day care is provided for all high school students with children (Site B School Improvement Plan, 2000).

The public school administrative structure consists of one superintendent, an assistant superintendent for curriculum, and an assistant superintendent for personnel. Each individual building has a principal, with an assistant principal at each of the middle schools. There are two assistant principals at the district's high school.

The local school district currently has an enrollment of 5,039 students. The students' racial and ethnic backgrounds include 80.4% White, 13.6% Black, 5.0% Hispanic, 0.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.1% Native American. Low-income households comprise 41.8% of the population. Limited-English-Proficient students comprise 0.2% of the population. The chronic truancy rate is 5.5%. The district's attendance rate is 93.5%, and the mobility rate is 19.7%.

The local school district employs 318 classroom teachers. Staff members holding bachelor's degrees make up 66.3%, and teachers with master's degrees and above comprise 33.7%. The average teaching experience within the district is 16.0 years. The average salary for teachers in the district is $38,008. The average salary among administrators is $61,700. The certified teaching staff is composed of 70.9% female and 29.1% male. Ethnicity in the staff is 94.3% White, 4.1% Black, 1.3% Hispanic, 0.3% Asian/Pacific Islander. The student to teacher ratio within the district is 14.7:1. The student to administrator ratio is 273.3:1. Instructional expenditure per pupil is $3,453, and operating expenditure per pupil is $5,326 (District Report Card, 1999).

The small Mid-western community, including a 25 mile radius, is composed of 42,658 people. The largest portion of the employed population are white collar workers at 45.7% with

31.6% considered blue collar employees. Other occupational areas are other service jobs 13.5%, farming, forestry and fishing 7.1%, protective service 1.6%, and private household service 0.5%. The median household income is $28,933 with an average of $35,642. In this community 39.6% of the residents hold high school degrees, 18.4% have earned some college credit, and 19% have a college degree or beyond (Census 1990).

Private educational opportunities in the city include two parochial schools. One school services grades K-8. The second school serves grades K-12. Post-secondary educational opportunities include a four-year liberal arts college and a two-year community college.

A city technology center opened in 1996. It was a collaborative effort between the colleges, the public school district and local businesses. The technology center is accessible to the community, providing an avenue to the information highway. The center fosters communication for individuals who have limited access to technology. The technology center is utilized for satellite courses and training local employees.

Within the city there are several churches that meet the spiritual needs of the various religious and ethnic groups. There are 45 Protestant churches, 3 Roman Catholic churches and a Jewish synagogue. The majority of the population in the community is White, 87.9%, followed by Black, 8.7%, and other, 3.4%. The majority of the residents of the community are between the ages of 25-44, with the smallest sector being between the ages of 15-24 (Census 1990).

A historical downtown area is located at the center of the community. One street offers specialty shops and full-service restaurants which provide unique dining experiences. Also, located downtown is a hands-on children's museum offering a multitude of learning experiences for children of all ages. Victorian homes outline this downtown district.

Within the same community, Site A and Site C sit adjacent to one another in the northwest quadrant. Site A does not have a through street. Both are located one block from the

city's newer business district which is comprised of restaurants, gas stations, grocery stores, individual retail stores, and a shopping mall. In addition to the business district, there are several residential areas near both sites. These include areas of newer homes and seven apartment complexes. Three of these complexes are subsidized housing units. There are opportunities for recreation in the surrounding community. These include a bowling alley, YMCA, fitness centers, movie theater, three parks, tennis courts, miniature golf course, and an arcade. A rural agricultural area is located half of a mile from Site A and Site C.

Site B within the same community is located on the western edge of town along the city's main street. The school provides educational services to students from a variety of dwellings. Residential areas consist of rental and privately owned homes, apartments, mobile home park, and two subsidized housing units. A wide range of rural housing and agricultural land surrounds the school as well. Directly across the street from Site B is a family-owned ice cream stand. Traveling west along the same street is a car dealership, plant nursery, home discount store, meat-packing facility and the community airport. A variety of drinking establishments, which include an adult entertainment facility, are located south of Site B, as well as a public health service building, and a warehouse that sells memberships to access a variety of goods. A large refrigeration factory is located southwest of the site, with a prison directly across from the factory. A variety of businesses are located northeast of Site B consisting of a grocery store, gas station, adult bookstore, and many small local businesses.

School district tax referendums were put to a vote in 1987 and 1988. The 1987 referendum requested a tax to support education and operations and maintenance. This referendum did not pass. Another referendum was on the ballot the following spring, focusing only education. A citizen commitee was formed in support of the tax referendum. A slogan was adopted, and the referendum narrowly passed in March of 1988. Some of these same individuals

were involved in raising money for the public school foundation which helped construct a new gym and pool at Site C.

NATIONAL CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

Low writing skills among students indicate a growing problem of national concern. Symptoms of an ineffective writing program include a decline in writing scores, writing assessments which omit writing samples, an inadequate amount of assistance for students with writing problems, and criticisms regarding waning writing achievement (Applebee, 1981). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (1994) found that many students at all grade levels had serious difficulty in producing effective informative, persuasive and narrative writing. Low writing achievement is not an area of weakness just in the mainstream population. Students with learning disabilities had difficulty meeting the needs of their reading audience due to lack of focus on planning and organization (Troia, Graham, & Harris 1999). Vacca and Alverman's (1998) research supported these findings and stated that students did not elaborate in their writing. According to Coddling, Gambrell, Kennedy, Palmer, and Graham (1996), "Many students will complete assigned writing tasks without ever becoming deeply and personally involved in their writing" (p.1). They are merely "getting by" as writers. According to the U.S. Department of Education (1990), "Study after study shows that students' writings lack clarity, coherence, and organization. Only a few students can write persuasive essays or competent business letters...And students say they like writing less and less...as they go through school" (p. 3).

Recent research reflected a connection between competency in written language and the self- concept of the individual writer (Oxford & Shearin 1994). Maehr further stated that many writing tasks in school put emphasis on writing that is not meaningful to students. Consequently, children do not develop a positive relationship between reading and writing.

According to Ford's Motivational Systems Theory, as cited in Coddling and Gambrell (1997), goals are more likely to be pursued if they had personal relevance and importance.

Chapter 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Prior to implementing an intervention, the researchers distributed surveys to students, parents, and teachers to document the extent of student lack of motivation to write. Sixty-one students were surveyed at the three targeted sites, with Site A-Clasroom B excluded because the survey was developmentally inappropriate for those students. By administering surveys to students, parents, and faculty members, researchers established baseline data regarding perceptions of writing instruction and performance. Through the use of the surveys it was the goal of the researchers to gain a better understanding of students' self-perceptions about their writing, thus gaining insight into student motivation. The surveys consisted of seven questions on the teacher survey and eight questions on the parent survey. Researchers felt that one of the seven teacher questions and two of the eight parent questions were more relevant to this action research. Therefore, those questions were targeted as a baseline for this study. Students were given two questionnaires. One focused on WHAT DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WRITING, the other focused on WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT WRITING. Students were asked to complete both surveys. Again, relevant questions were chosen for the purpose of action research. These surveys were originally designed by Codling & Gambell (1997). The following data provides a thorough inquiry into student motivation to write, which is directly impacted by parents and teachers.

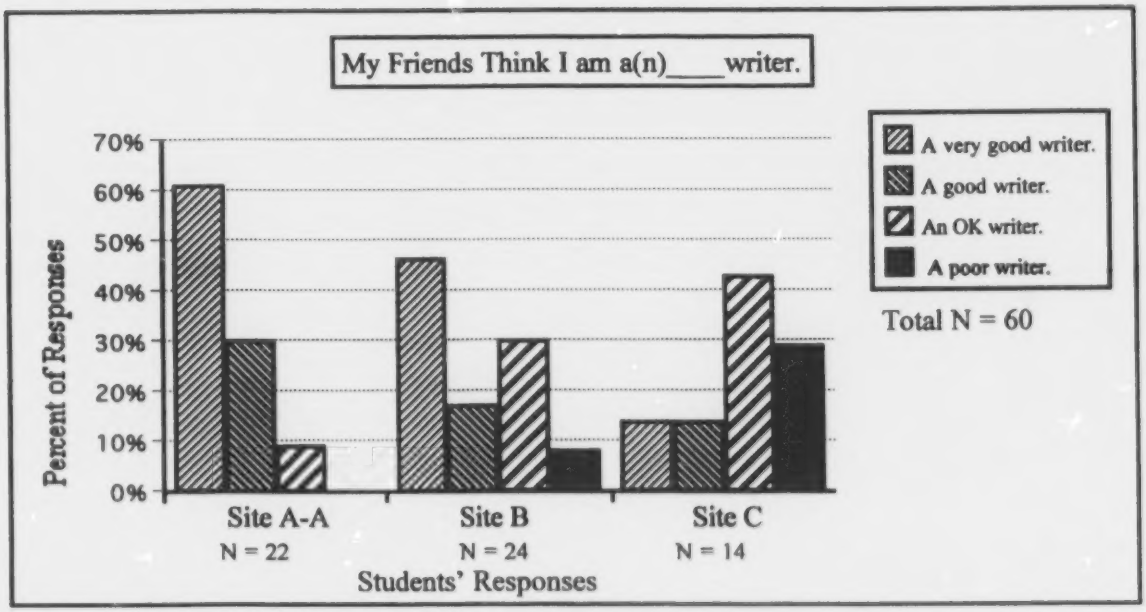

Figure 1. "My friends think I am a(n)_____writer"

"WHAT DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WRITING?" was the first survey administered to students (Appendix A). Figure 1 reflects how surveyed students responded to how they felt their friends viewed them as writers. The choices were: a) *a very good writer*, b) *a good writer*, c) *an OK writer*, and d) *a poor writer*. Twenty-two students at Site A-Classroom A responded to this question. Sixty-one percent of those surveyed felt that their friends viewed them as *very good writers*, while 30% were perceived as *good writers*, and 9% were seen as *OK writers*. Over half of the students perceived themselves as *very good writers*. Twenty-four students participated in the survey at Site B. Forty-six percent responded that they felt their friends viewed them as *very good writers*, 17% *good writers*, 29% *OK writers*, and 8% *poor writers*. Fourteen students from Site C responded to the same question. Fourteen percent of the students said that their friends perceived them to be very *good writers*, and fourteen percent of the students reported that their friends viewed them to be *good writers*. Forty-three percent of the students said that their friends viewed them as *OK writers*, while 29% of the respondents reported that they believed their friends viewed them as *poor writers*. These results seem to

substantiate the idea that peer influence plays a vital role over the course of time. Site C's data suggests that young adults' feelings about writing are heightened by peer perception.

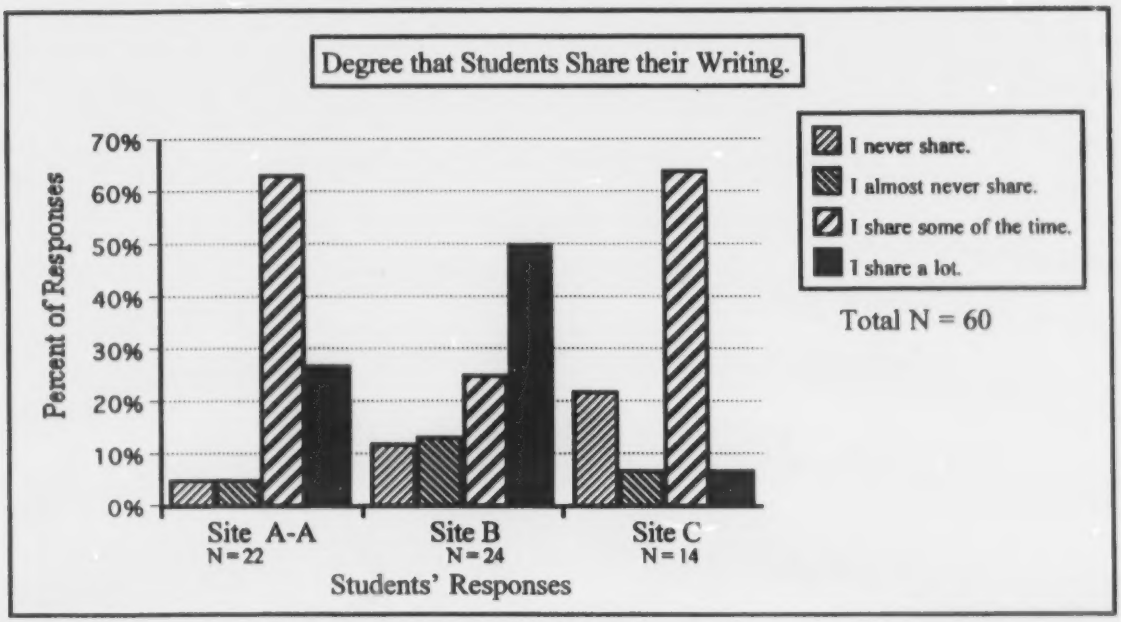

Figure 2. Degree that students share what I write with my family.

In addition to the survey, "WHAT DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WRITING?," the students at Site A, Classroom A, Site B, and Site C were asked to complete a second survey, "WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT WRITING?" (Appendix B). Students at Site A-Classroom B were again exempted by their age from this survey, since it was not developmentally appropriate. An important key indicator of student motivation to write involves student willingness to share writing at home (Figure 2). Site A-Classroom A surveyed 22 students and asked if they shared what they wrote with family members. Students could choose from four responses: a) *I never share*, b) *I almost never share*, c) *I share some of the time*, or d) *I share a lot*. Responses indicated that 5% of the students *never* or *almost never shared* what they wrote, while 63% said they *shared some of the time*, and 27% said they *shared their writing a lot*. Most of the respondents perceived themselves as sharing a majority of the time. Twenty-four students at

Site B were also surveyed. Student responses were as follows: a) 12%, b) 13%, c) 25%, and d) 50%. The results from Site B were significant when compared with Figure 3, which addresses parents' perceptions of how often students share their writing. In comparison, student perceptions differed significantly from parent responses concerning how often students share their writing at home. Of the fourteen students at Site C, the majority (64%) responded, *I share some of the time*. Twenty-two percent said, *I never share*, while seven percent answered, *I almost never share*, and seven percent said, *I share a lot*.

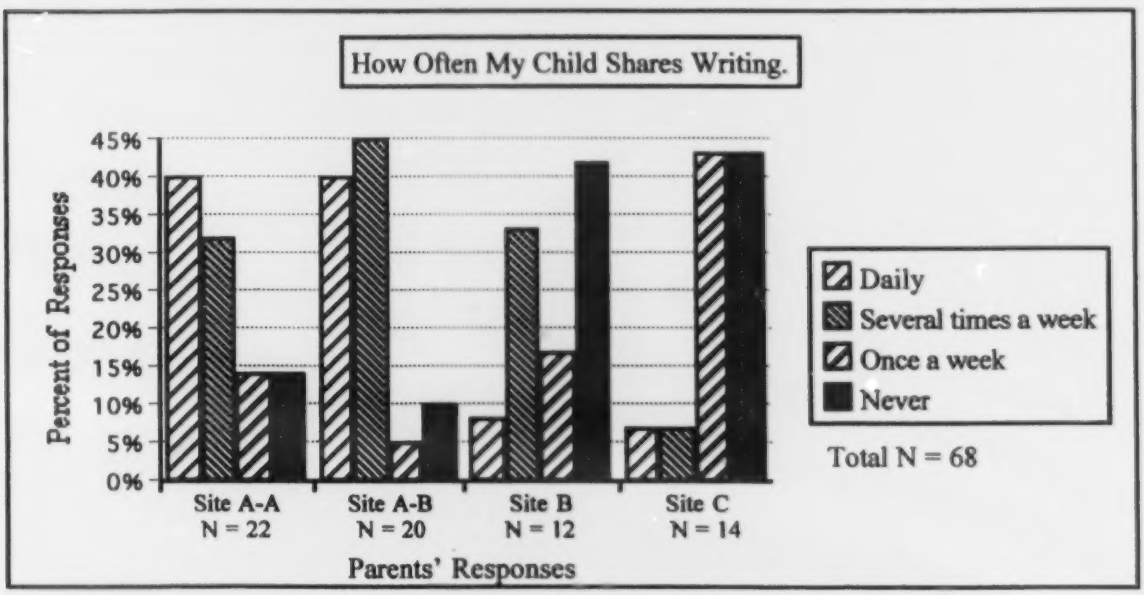

Figure 3. Parents' responses to survey inquiry.

Parents serve as a valuable resource of information regarding students' perceptions of writing. Parents of all the targeted students from both Classroom A and B at Site A, Site B, and Site C were asked to complete a Pre-Intervention Survey (Appendix C). A similar question about how often students shared writing at home was also posed to these parents. Parents were surveyed regarding this issue to compare parent perceptions to those of the student. Parents were asked how frequently their child discussed what they were writing about at school. Parents

could choose from the following options: a) *daily*, b) *several times a week*, c) *once a week*, and d) *never* (Figure 3). Twenty-two parents of students at Site A-Classroom A completed and returned the survey. The parents' responses indicated that 40% of the children shared writing activities *daily*, while 32% indicated writing was being shared *several times a week*, and 14% indicated sharing occurred *once a week* or *never*. In Site A-Classroom B, 100% of the surveys distributed were returned. Parents responded as follows: 40% *daily*, 45% *several times a week*, 5% *once a week*, and 10% *never*. Parents from Site B responded as follows: 8% *daily*, 33% *several times a week*, 17% *once a week*, and 42% *never*. Parent responses and student responses regarding this issue were significantly different. Half of the surveyed responded that they *shared a lot* with their family (Figure 2), while 42% of the parents surveyed responded that their child *never shared* writing activities from school at home. This comparison suggests to the researcher at Site B that perhaps parents may not be listening to their children at home. Another finding which may impact upon student motivation to write, is the fact that only half of the surveys sent home were completed and returned. The researcher at Site B sent three copies of the survey to homes that did not respond. After three attempts to gather information about student writing at home, the researcher at Site B felt that the lack of parent involvement to complete the survey was insightful information regarding this issue. One hundred percent of the parents of students at Site C completed and returned the surveys. Forty-three percent of the parents responded that their children told them about a writing activity *once a week*, while another 43% reported that their students *never* told them about writing activities. Seven percent of the parents said that their child told them about a writing activity *daily*, while seven percent of the parents said that their child told them about a writing activity *several times a week*.

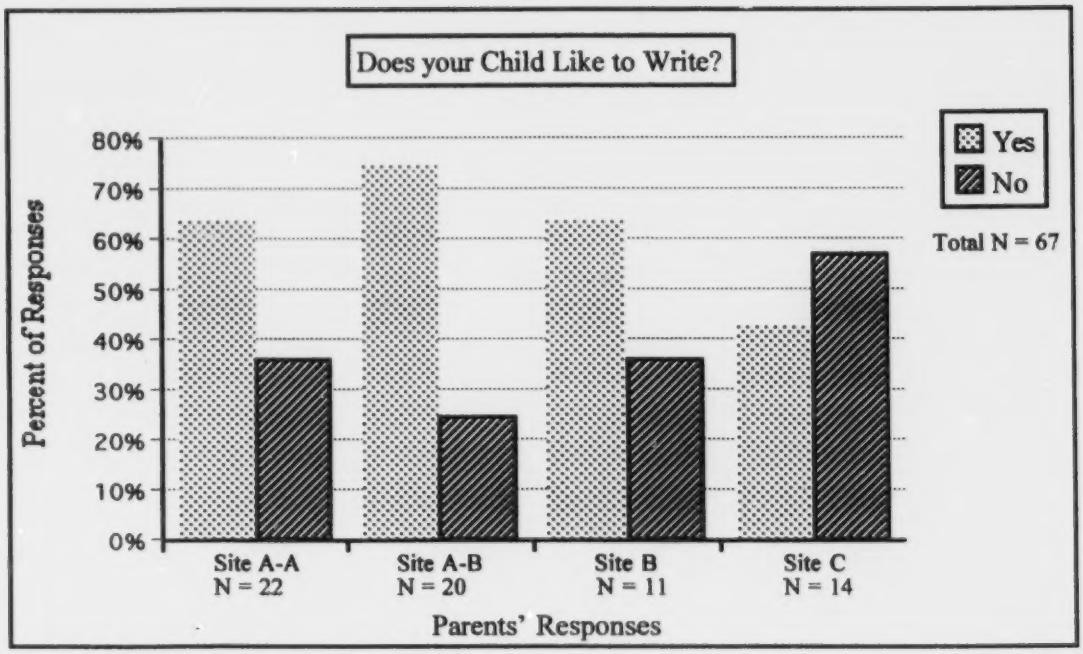

Figure 4, "Does your child like to write?"

Parents were also asked to respond to the question, "Does your child like to write?" (Figure 4). When twenty-two parents at Site A-Classroom A were asked this question, 64% indicated that they thought that their child liked to write, while 36% responded that their child did not like to write. This finding is consistent with the students' self-perception of themselves as very good writers (Figure 1). It is interesting to note that while 36% of the parents responded that their child do not like to write, only 9% of the students viewed themselves as *OK writers*, and none of the students viewed themselves as *poor writers*. Site A-Classroom B distributed 20 surveys to parents to find out their perceptions of their children's motivation to write. One hundred percent of the parent surveys were returned. On another positive note 75% of the parents responded that their child liked to write, while only 25% felt that their child did not like to write. At Site B, 11 of 24 surveys were completed and returned. Sixty-four percent responded *yes*, while 36% responded *no*. The limited number of responses resulted in skewed and disproportionate data. At Site C, 100% of the parents responded to the question. Fifty-

seven percent of the parents responded that their child did not like to write. Forty-three percent reported that their child did like to write. Site C was the only one to have more *no* responses than *yes* responses.

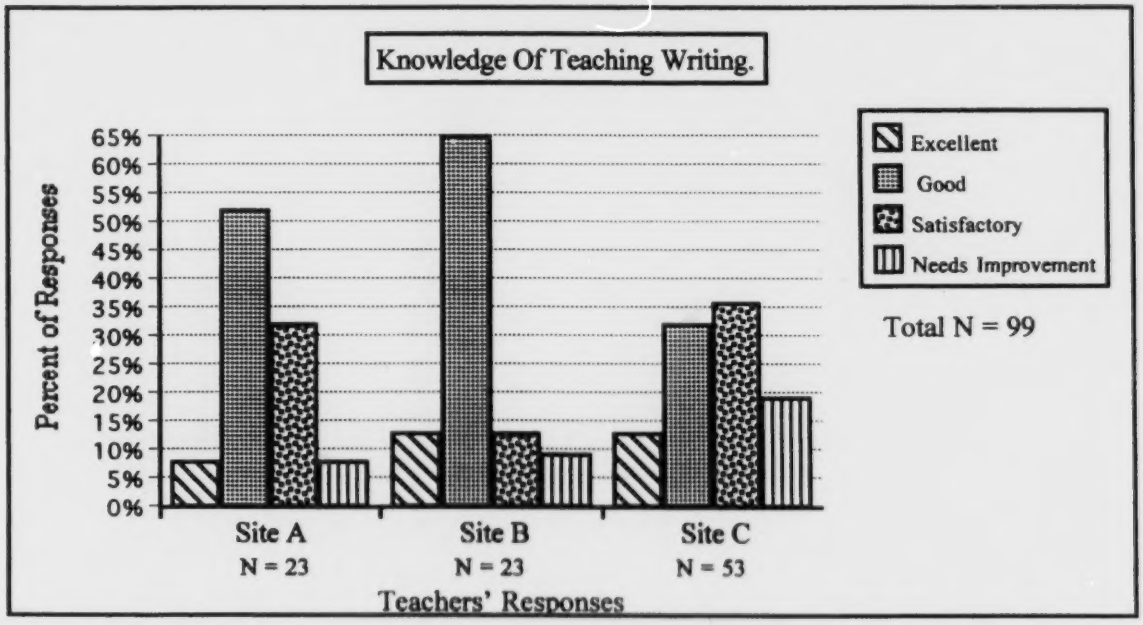

Figure 5. "How would you rate your knowledge teaching writing (or writing instruction)?"

To gain a thorough understanding of the problem regarding students' lack of motivation to write, the researchers from all three sites surveyed faculty members. In the Teacher Survey (Appendix D), faculty members were asked to rate their knowledge of teaching writing. Teachers could rate their knowledge as follows: *excellent*, *good*, *satisfactory*, and *needs improvement* (Figure 5). Site A received 23 responses . The majority of the faculty surveyed, 65%, felt that their knowledge of teaching writing was *good*. Eight percent of the faculty judged their ability to teach writing as *excellent*, and another 8% judged their ability as *needs improvement*. Thirty two of the faculty viewed themselves as having *satisfactory* knowledge of writing instruction. Site B also received 23 responses to this survey question. The results were similar to those at Site A, with 65% of the instructors rating their knowledge of writing instruction as *good*, and 9% as

needs improvement. Thirteen percent of the faculty members at Site B rated their knowledge of writing instruction as *excellent*, or *satisfactory* respectively. While few teachers at Site C actually teach the writing process, instructors from all departments were surveyed. Of 103 surveys distributed, 55 were returned. However, only 52 teachers responded to this survey question. The researchers questioned why the response at Site C was not as high as at Site A and Site B. One plausible reason for the lower response may be the fact that teachers at Site C are departmentalized and teach a specific subject area. Many of the faculty members may feel that writing instruction does not affect them because their particular area of expertise may be math, science, vocational education, etc. Almost an equal number rated their knowledge of teaching writing as *satisfactory* and *good*. Nineteen percent of the respondents rated their knowledge of teaching writing as *satisfactory*, while seventeen percent rated their knowledge as *good*. Nineteen percent rated their knowledge of teaching writing as *needs improvement*, while thirteen percent rated their knowledge as *excellent*.

Probable Causes

State and local writing scores have shown a gradual decline over the past few years. Researchers believe that targeting the motivation as a key component to writing difficulties due to a variety of reasons will improve writing achievement. A great deal of focus by educators has been applied to cognitive strategies. Researchers have not paid as much attention to writing motivation as they have to reading (Codling & Gambrell, 1997). In the research which has been conducted, possible links to lack of motivation include: self-perception, control of the writing task, the amount of time to complete a process piece and lack of emphasis on graphic organizers, peer collaboration, and relevance.

Opinions of others influence many facets of children's daily lives. Children receive messages from peers about their dress, talk and behavior. Children also receive messages about the way they write. When sharing completed writing projects with peers and adults, opinions and feedback influence children's feelings about themselves as writers. Children often base their self-perception of writing ability on the way in which peers have reacted to their writing (Codling et al., 1996). Children's perception of their writing ability starts at an early age. Their self-perception is not only shaped by other people's opinions, but by previous successes experienced through writing. Students who do not achieve success at an early age are not motivated to write as they continue through the educational system (NAEP, 1992). Self-perception is a greater predictor of achievement in writing than their academic ability (Fulk & Montgomery-Grymes, 1994). As these children enter junior high, they continue to experience failure in writing due to lack of self-confidence. Not only are they reluctant, but many of them refuse to write (Carignan-Belleville,1989). The researchers have observed non-participation as a strategy that reluctant learners use to avoid failure. These students often focus their attention on off-task behaviors such as talking, gazing out the window, and playing with items in their desks

or book bags. Failure across the curriculum becomes the expectation of these students (Cohen & deBettencourt, 1991).

Lifetime literacy is strongly linked to intrinsic motivation. As students progress through school, their intrinsic desire to write may decrease. One probable cause of this decrease is due to teacher-centered instruction (Sanacore, 1997). At-risk students are often instructed in environments that are teacher-controlled and non-challenging. Teachers often focus on basic skills rather than more open ended activities that would challenge and encourage students to use their imagination and higher order thinking skills. Unfortunately, this is a contradiction to the necessary instructional environment which incorporates freedom of choice and challenging tasks (Dicintio & Gee, 1999). Teacher-dominated activities tend to stifle opportunities for the students to genuinely express themselves, thus diminishing their intrinsic motivation for writing (Sanacore, 1997). Frequently, teacher selected topics and activities are of no interest to students. Decisions teachers make regarding curriculum greatly influence the learners' engagement in the task. When students are given more control or options, enthusiasm for learning increases and transfer is more likely to occur. Educators must now look at the connections lessons make with their students to facilitate independence (Williams & Woods, 1997). When the curriculum is connected to real life situations such as building a house, planting a garden, applying for a job, and communicating with others for business and personal enjoyment the necessity to transfer is paramount. Students, given few opportunities to make choices and decisions regarding their writing tasks, had difficulty achieving success and did not value literacy for communication or enjoyment. Without allowing decision making in creating a product, efforts made by students were often considered mechanical (Turner & Paris, 1995). Students often become frustrated in learning environments which neglect to tap in to the student's innate desire tc learn. The ideal classroom environments are those which give students the ability to control their learning

(Young, Mathews, Kietzmann, & Westerfield, 1997). Students' control of their own learning indicated an increase in motivation (Dicintio, 1999). The motivation offered to children for completing writing tasks is too often based solely on the letter grade they will receive. Individuals who pursue writing as a profession are rewarded by having the opportunity to share their ideas with a vast audience (Lewis, 2000).

At the elementary level, skill drills are prevalent while opportunities to write a complete piece are limited due to emphasis on mechanical correctness. Teachers at this level are required to teach basic skills, and little time can be spent on polishing and applying those skills. Much of the writing format completed at the secondary level is fill-in-the-blank and short answer. Mastery and application could be achieved at this level, however, teachers often rely on knowledge type questions and activities due to the vast number of students they see each day Successful writing instruction emphasizes the entire writing process, not just the mechanical aspects (Holbrook, 1994). At times this emphasis on mechanics causes students to become so fearful that they do not even attempt to transfer their stories to paper (Roush, 1992). Literacy is not just the responsibility of the English teacher; it belongs to all teachers. This suggests that little time is given to the writing process outside the English class (Vacca & Alverman, 1998). Organizing and processing information can be a challenging task for students. This challenge is compounded by the fact that children are not given adequate opportunities to practice these skills. Making information useful requires information to be presented using graphic organizers to aid these students (Cohn & de Bettencourt,1991). Troia, Graham, & Harris (1999) noted that students with learning disabilities have difficulty organizing and planning for writing tasks. Consequently, they have difficulty meeting the needs of their reading audience. Though students experience enjoyment from sharing their writing with others, often times it is a struggle for them to compose it in written word. By allowing students to first think through the piece they are

about to write using graphic organizers, it reduces their fear and increases their enthusiasm for the task. As students become more confident of their abilities, they begin to view themselves as writers (Etchinson,1995).

When working individually, the reluctant writer may lack self-esteem or is avoiding the basic mechanics of the task. These writers are able to achieve success when working collaboratively. Those who are weighed down by the mechanical aspect of a writing task are supported and encouraged by group editing. Once students have been taught to work collaboratively, they then feel a sense of success and accomplishment. Peer editing adds to a sense of security for these writers (Roush,1992).

Research indicates that there is a correlation between task relevance and the amount of planning and effort students put forth toward writing tasks. More planning and effort is shown in situations where students see relevance of the task. (Codling, et al. 1996). For example, students who actively participate in the designing, ordering, planting, and caring of the class prairie plot are more excited about sharing this experience through writing. The amount of effort exerted by students in order to accomplish a writing assignment or objective is largely dependent on the task value as perceived by the students (Codling & Gambrell, 1997). Ngeow (1998) stated that learning becomes meaningful when learners deem them transferable to other settings. As an increasing number of high school age students find it necessary to seek employment, it becomes noticeably important to incorporate actual job applications into the curriculum. By incorporating such materials, students can visibly see the relevance of writing. Society is placing more emphasis than ever on instruction which concentrates on a "back to basics" approach (Routman, 1996). Vacca and Alverman (1998) reported that basic performance levels in both reading and writing were achieved by most adolescents. However, all fourth, eighth, and twelfth grade

students whose writing skills were assessed were unable to complete more sophisticated writing assignments. This suggests that teachers need to incorporate more relevant, higher order thinking skills into writing instruction. According to Routman (1996):

> Unless our students can read and write for their own purposes, to make sense of their world, to understand and critique the media and all they read, and to create beauty, we will have what many have asked for- a "basics" society, dull and unimaginative. (p. 84)

Students who find little meaning in school and put energy into failure avoidance activities indicate problems with motivation. Students often see little relevance in their work as is evidenced by comments "I'll never need to use this" and "Why do I need to learn this?". Reluctant learners, who avoid participation, may eventually labeled at-risk students. This implies that students who are identified as reluctant learners at an earlier age can benefit from suitable interventions. Those children who do not profit from such interventions are in jeopardy of becoming a dropout statistic (Cohen & deBettencourt, 1991).

Human beings are born with the need to use writing as a means to comprehend and make sense of the world around them (Codling et. al. 1996). If this need exists, why does there appear to be a problem motivating students to become writers? The aforementioned research indicated that many elements seem to be absent in the formula for writing motivation. These important elements are positive self-perception, task control, adequate time to devote to the writing piece, graphic organizers, peer collaboration and relevant, applicable lessons.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Why do schools promote reading and writing as separate entities? Traditionally schools approach language arts by introducing reading skills as the main focus, with written communication taking place after reading skills have been introduced and, in some cases, even mastered. Research indicates that children are interested in writing before they are able to read (Hall, Moretz & Statom, 1976). According to Strickland and Morrow (1989), studies of the emergent literacy period indicate that young children have a natural tendency to learn writing skills very easily. If this is the case, why do schools promote reading and writing skills as separate entities? Because of this approach to writing (Codling et al., 1996), many students do not see the relevance of writing, and are thus unmotivated to write. The following research will exhibit various solutions and strategies that will enhance student self-perception, utilize collaboration, support teacher modeling, and demonstrate relevance.

Writer's Workshop

Some researchers are in support of a "Writers Workshop" (Fischer, 1995; Power, 1997), which incorporates writing every day and is based on student choice. In Writer's Workshop students work on long term writing assignments. Daily work and drafts are kept in a folder which access for both teacher and student. On any given day, one may walk into a classroom in

which Writer's Workshop is taking place. Students may be working at any stage of the writing process. Some students may be brainstorming, while others are working on rough drafts and still others are illustrating finished pieces. In addition, students may be sharing their stories in the author's chair. While students are actively engaged in different stages of the writing process, the teacher confers with individual students.

The most beneficial part of writer's workshop is the conferencing and questioning stage. When conferencing, teachers give reflective feedback and ask questions which help the blossoming writer enrich their piece and move on to the next stage. Power agrees that a key ingredient in an effective program involves the use of teaching children to ask better questions (1997). Power supports the technique of asking open-ended questions that will foster more dialogue about student writing. Questions should be asked that help keep students on task. In addition, questions are formulated that help students identify patterns in their writing which will, in turn, help them grow as writers and develop individual writing styles. Finally, Power suggests a method that aids the teacher during student writing conferences such as asking them to elaborate on their writing (1997).

Fischer's five components for creating a meaningful and dynamic writing workshop are essential parts to creating an effective program and can be used as a guide to developing "Writer's Workshop": a positive attitude of trust and commitment, an understanding of the process of writing, a methodical arrangement of writing materials, a predictable daily routine and a teacher with clear goals. Keeping these components in mind, teachers must continue to reflect and polish their program. According to Fischer, continuing to refine a "Writer's Workshop" program is necessary to enable students to experience success (1995).

Student Choice

Research has also shown that student choice is another powerful tool to increase motivation to write (Beigert, 1995; Fulk & Montgomery-Grymes 1994; Turner & Paris, 1995). Student choice is giving students the opportunity to make some decisions concerning writing assignments. Student choice empowers student learning. When students feel they have some control over their learning, transfer occurs and connections are made. According to Turner and Paris, students apply more effort and develop a deeper understanding of new materials when given the opportunity to choose writing tasks. Furthermore, student-selected writing tasks have more personal value, encouraging students to use a variety of learning strategies. Because activities are chosen by the students, they develop a personal responsibility for their writing. To accomplish tasks of choice, students set writing goals and decide on how they will achieve these goals. In contrast, when teachers deny students the opportunity to choose writing activities, personal creativity is stifled and student writing becomes more mechanical. Activities that use closed tasks (tasks with no choice) inhibit students chances to make personal decisions about their writing. Open-ended activities, on the other hand, empower students to make writing more meaningful to them, increasing motivation (1995).

Another method of empowerment is to provide students with a menu of writing assignments. Similar to a menu in a restaurant, a writing menu offers student choice and selection. Learning objectives that work in conjunction with students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) can even be used to design the menu of choices. Teachers provide required assignments within the menu. However, the fundamental piece to the success of this approach is the freedom to choose from the list of menu option. Several other strategies to include along with the assignment menu are flexible due dates, self-scoring and self-correction, varying length of assignment and goal setting (Fulk & Montgomery-Grymes, 1994).

Journaling

Journals are an effective writing strategy which supports student choice. Journaling is a way for students to share their feelings and thoughts in a non-threatening way. Tichenor and Jewell assert that through journal writing students have the opportunity to explore language, feelings, and experiences building on prior knowledge. Writing has a powerful influence on learning in all subject areas. For example, the use of journals aids reading comprehension and further develops math skills. After reading a selection, students may demonstrate their understanding of a story by responding to it in their reading journals. Through their responses, students often make connections to proir knowledge and experiences. Students can also use writing skills to explain their reasoning for solving math problems. Math journaling allows the teacher the opportunity to evaluate the students thought processes in solving problems. The current theory on teaching writing is to provide open ended instructional experiences that can be found through journaling (1996). Students who share their experinces through writing are often more excited about their writing and spend more time on their work. Journaling leads students to internalize their learning, thus enhancing the learning so they possess a wider breadth of knowledge. Students are allowed to use reading and writing skills in a meaningful way that provides avenues to other kinds of writing while working in journals (Peyton, 1993). Journals provide a writing environment that fosters positive attitudes and is non-threatening (Tichenor & Jewell, 1996). The emphasis is more on the creative content rather than mechanics.

Motivation

Furthermore, moderately challenging writing tasks directly impact students' self-perception (Fulk & Montgomery-Grymes, 1994; Turner & Paris, 1995). Motivation is promoted within various writing activities by providing an appropriate level of challenge to all students (Fulk & Montgomery-Grymes, 1994). When students are motivated about the work

they are doing, their written products are likely to have more substance. Moderately challenging tasks have motivational value by supporting the occurrence of flow which is "...characterized by a match between the challenge afforded by the environment and the skills of the individual (DiCintio & Gee, 1999, p. 232)." According to Csikszentmihalyi (as cited in DiCintio & Gee, 1999), the sustained experience of flow is "...defined by a clarity of goals and consciousness, a sense of control over the situation, a loss of self-consciousness, and altered sense of time, and a feeling of automaticity." Students feel empowerment when they experience flow during writing activities. When students are motivated to write the basic writing process becomes innate. Paris and Turner state that the real benefit in such "peak" experiences is using what students learn from their successes and failures to help them grow as writers. Moderately challenging tasks lead to positive self-perceptions because they furnish feedback (1995). This feedback allows students the opportunity to reflect upon their writing thus developing a better sense of themselves as writers.

Celebrations and Self Image

Researchers agree that celebrating writing accomplishments is a critical element to developing positive self-perceptions (Lewis, 2000; Massey, 1995; Roush, 1992). Massey (1995) and Roush (1992) believe that publishing student writing is an important step that is traditionally skipped due to a lack of time. However, children need to see their work in published form. The goal behind publishing students' writing is to promote good writing practices and build enthusiasm for writing (Massey, 1995; Roush, 1992). Students view themselves as published writers after seeing the writing process go full circle from beginning to end. Roush believes that after students' works have been published student writing achievement should be celebrated with author autographing parties (1992). Typically, society puts emphasis on obtaining celeberty autographs. The term celeberty usually pertains to movie stars,

professional atheletes, music groups, etc. Autograph parties provide the means by which to celebrate writing as a respected talent and elevate students' self image. Lewis takes celebrating a step further by organizing a schoolwide writers' festival. Lewis (2000) believes that children, unfortunately, "...rarely receive any more motivation to write than the grade they know they'll get for an assignment" (p.29-30). By publishing an anthology of children's work and sharing it at a schoolwide writer's festival, students will feel like they are actual writers (Lewis, 2000).

Collaboration

Turner and Paris cite collaboration among peers as another motivational strategy which enhances writing achievement. Three supporting reasons for the success of the collaboration are as follows: Dialogue among peers creates interest, students' observations of each others written products develops a sense of confidence, and cooperative learning engages the writer and promotes group awareness (1995). Durham supports these reasons and adds that sharing written work with peers encourages the shy and unmotivated writer. Cooperative learning supports the old adage "There is safety in numbers." The reclusive writer flourishes within the boundary of a small group setting. Students have the opportunity to be a writing mentor, while learning from each other. Daily sharing of written work allows students to progress and blossom at their own developmental rate (1997). During open ended collaborative writing activities, students can be invited to model and relay to peers vital concepts they have internalized. These activities empower students by giving them an active role in their learning, which increases motivation; the teacher then takes on the role of a facilitator (Turner & Paris, 1995).

Modeling

A conglomerate of researchers agree that modeling appropriate writing is a significant factor in developing motivation (Biegert,1995; Buchan, Fish & Prater, 1996; Lehr, 1995; Turner & Paris, 1995). Modeling writing strategies will assist students in understanding and applying

writing skills. It is proven that teachers who are most successful in motivating their students introduce, model, and provide opportunities for students to use many writing strategies (Turner & Paris 1995). Instructors who implement daily mini lessons on the writing process modeling key components that are challenging for students provide meaningful learning opportunities. Consistant, repetitive modeling of writing skills and techniques transfers like osmosis from teacher to student. Teacher modeling of an assortment of written genres is especially beneficial for students with learning disabilities (Buchan et al.; 1996). Studetns with learning disabilities need opportunities to be exposed to and practice diverse written genres to discover ones in which they can excell. Biegart maintains that modeling throughout the entire writing process (brainstorming, pre-writing, rough draft, revising, editing, publishing, sharing) will enable students to produce rich written work (1995). The direct teaching model while used during instruction of the writing process produces fruitful outcomes in students' written products. Instructional questions centered around written pieces during the revising stage yield better stories. The incentive of publishing students' work motivates students to take an active role in all aspects of the writing process. Everyone enjoys having their work spotlighted. Many teachers tend to leave the publishing stage out due to the lack of time. However, when providing opportunities to publish written work after modeling, students gain a motivational purpose to complete their written work (Lehr, 1995).

Relevance

Relevant writing tasks encourage students to demonstrate interest and ownership in their writing (Codling & Gambrell, 1997; Guthrie, Alao & Rinehart, 1997; Martino, 1993; Ngeow, 1998; Turner & Paris, 1995; Williams & Woods, 1997). Students who see writing tasks as intrinsically related tend to focus more on harvesting rich written products (Codling & Gambrell, 1997). Whereas, students who only see the writing task as a means to an end develop marginal

writing pieces. Guthrie, Alao and Rinehart support relevant writing by stating that teachers need to provide occasions in which students can apply their observations and life experiences to written work. Today's students come to schools with such a wide range of backgounds and experiences. Instructors need to build on these experiences when planning writing activities. The researchers extend this belief by saying that opportunities to build on life experiences should occur throughout the school day, thus triggering student excitement about writing (1997). When the learner is able to view writing as relevant and applicable to the real-world, (s)he will be able to apply meaning to the task, increasing the motivation to write (Ngeow,1998). Another important factor when assuring writing relevance is the fact that students develop organizational and self-monitoring skills which play an important role in developing writing styles (Turner & Paris, 1995). Williams and Woods assert that educators need to become more aware of their students "outside-of-school learner experiences" because of the impact these variables have on student motivation (1997). According to data gathered, relevance is a vital piece in developing writer motivation which is necessary for meaningful written products (Codling & Gambrell, 1997; Guthrie, Alao & Rinehart, 1997; Martino, 1993; Ngeow, 1998; Turner & Paris,1995; Williams & Woods, 1997).

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of instructional strategies used to increase students' motivation by enhancing student self-perception, utilizing collaboration, modeling and building relevance during the period of September 2000 through December 2000, the first, second, third and ninth through twelfth grade students from the targeted classes will increase their writing abilities as measured by students surveys, rubrics, journals, teacher anecdotal records and discussions.

In order to accomplish the researchers' goals for the writing intervention, the following processes are implemented.

- Surveys will be administered before and after the intervention.
- Appropriate modeling for writing activities will be conducted.
- A writing menu will be employed to empower student autonomy.
- Pen Pal correspondence will be used to develop relevance and collaboration.
- Writing activities will be developed which give relevance to district curriculum.
- Student portfolios will be developed.
- A variety of graphic organizers will be introduced, modeled and used.
- Cooperative learning activities will be utilized.
- Guest Speakers will come in to discuss the importance of wiriting in jobs and every day life.
- Students' writing efforts will be praised and celebrated.

Action Plan

The following action plan is intended to enhance students' self-perception in writing utilizing collaboration, modeling and relevance. Through the use of this action plan, the researchers hope that students will be motivated to write and will view themselves as writers.

Prior to the third week of September 2000, the researchers will administer baseline surveys to teachers and parents. The purpose of the teacher survey is to gain local insight to the problem. The parent survey will provide insight into the child's perception of writing. At the end of the intervention, a post survey will be distributed to parents determine if there has been a change in attitude towards writing.

Additional baseline data will be gathered at the onset of the intervention. During the third week of September, surveys to students will be administered which will evaluate writing preferences and attitudes towards writing. An additional student survey will be done at the end of the intervention to measure the effects of the action plan. Researchers will obtain writing samples for the purpose of comparison at the end of the intervention. During week one researchers will explain the expectations and assessments for writing. The writing process and graphic organizers for writing will be introduced. Daily Oral Language will be utilized as a form of proofreading. Researchers will engage students in discussions about the writing process and their views of writing.

During the next five weeks, class time will be spent on providing students with choices, time, and proper modeling of the writing process. This will be achieved through exposing the students to a medley of activities which include: journaling, letter writing, corresponding with pen pals, offering open ended writing menu options, writing activities which incorporate peer collaboration, and introducing mini-lessons to teach new skills. Different genres of writing such

as narrative, persuasive and expository writing, plays, poetry and autobiographical activities will also be explored.

The seventh through eleventh weeks of the intervention will in part be a continuation of the previous activities. In addition to corresponding with pen pals, students will have the opportunity to meet and share writing successes. Guest speakers will be invited to address the relevance of writing. Students at site C will transfer their writing achievement by filling out a job application.

The final week of the intervention will be used to gather post data that will hopefully indicate an increase in student motivation and a positive change in their view of themselves as writers. Post surveys will be administered to parents and students. New writing samples will be collected to compare to those prior to the interventions.

Action Plan Time line

Pre-intervention

- Gather baseline data (parent and faculty surveys)

Weeks 1-11

- Model all writing activities for students

Week 1

- Explain program and assessment to students
- Conduct student surveys (Site A, Classroom B excluded- developmentally inappropriate at this time)
- Discuss writing

- Introduce the writing process
- Do Daily Oral Language exercises

Weeks 2-6

- Collect writing samples
- Introduce journaling
- Introduce written correspondences
- Initiate pen pal program
- Introduce and implement writing menu (open ended assignments)
- Begin peer collaborative writing activities
- Conduct mini-lessons as needed to introduce new skills
- Introduce and implement different genres of writing (narrative, expository and persuasive writing, poetry, plays, autobiographical activities, etc.)

Weeks 7-11

- Continue implementation of the writing process
- Continue pen pal activities
- Meet with pen pals for a writing celebration
- Continue written correspondence activities applicable to classroom needs
- Continue and expand journaling
- Continue to work collaboratively with peers on writing activities
- Continue DOL
- Teach mini-lessons as needed to refine specific writing skills
- Practice using the different genres of writing
- Invite guest speakers to support the relevance of writing
- Practice completing job applications (Site C only)

Week 12

- Collect new writing samples to compare to beginning samples
- Re-administer student and parent surveys

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, the researchers will assess writing motivation using a variety of tools. Surveys will be distributed to parents, teachers, and faculty to assess their attitudes about children's writing perceptions. Parent and student surveys will be re-administered at the end of the intervention, and the data will be compared to measure the effects of the action plan. Teacher anecdotal records, scoring rubrics, observation checklists and student self-evaluation forms will be used. Additionally, portfolios containing evidence of writing samples will be analyzed and maintained.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to enhance student motivation to write by changing student self perception, utilizing collaboration, modeling and relevance. The implementation of a variety of writing genres and celebrating writing successes were selected to increase student motivation to write. Students were expected to practice their writing styles using relevant, meaningful writing genres. The students were taught a variety of approaches to writing to address the diverse learning needs of all students.

The action research encompassed a total of twelve school weeks with a specific time line to implement the action plan. Prior to the intervention, parents (Appendix C) were surveyed regarding their impressions of their child's writing. The focus of the survey was to establish whether students shared their writing at home, thus providing insight into how students felt about their writing abilities. Highly motivated students tend to feel pride and ownership towards their products due to their abilities. Faculty members (Appendix D) were also surveyed to gain a better understanding about how educators view their writing instruction. During Week One, students were surveyed (Appendices A and B) to gather preintervention data to ascertain how

the students viewed themselves as writers. Week One also encompassed introductions to a variety of writing genres and techniques.

Graphic organizers were introduced and used during the intervention. To begin, the researchers started with students choosing four pictures that were related to a topic. The organizer then progressed into a topic sentence with students supplying four related words. An example topic sentence would be: "I like many foods." Then, students drew and labeled pictures of four favorite foods. Toward the end of the intervention, students were writing simple paragraphs with a topic sentence, supporting details, and a closing "wrap-up" sentence. Students were much more enthusiastic about writing when they were able to utilize this superlative organizer. In previous years the researchers had not used this organizer. At the third grade level, detailed sentences were written by students. Sentences were initially read orally from the organizer to develop an understanding of focus and organization of a paragraph. The next step involved writing the sentences to look like a paragraph. The steps that followed increased the amount of writing. Whole class, partner and individual writing pieces were created. Sentences were then replaced by key words. Students created sentences from the key words. Connecting words were also introduced to be used to begin each paragraph. After several weeks of practice, students were ready to create multiple paragraph essays.

At the beginning of Week Two, students received conversation journals. The journals encouraged the use of standard English, spelling, cursive writing, and proper letter format. The teachers suggested the students talk to them through this journal. The teachers modeled proper letter format and expected students to write at least a couple of telling sentences and one asking sentence. Students turned in their journals at least once a week.

Reader response journals were another type of journals that were used. These journals were used to record written responses to literature selections. Once again the rationale on the

researchers' part was to provide a way for written communication to have relevance and purpose. Students had the power over writing their own reactions based on what they read. Whereas, when responding orally, students may be swayed to respond in the fashion according to the majority. Through written responses, students had the security to write what they genuinely felt.

Also during Week Two, each morning students searched for mistakes in two daily oral language sentences. This provided practice in handwriting, as well as proofreading. The first few weeks students corrected the mistakes and recopied the sentences correctly onto paper from the board. Once the students became comfortable with this process, they wrote each sentence correctly on their own. When all students completed this task, students were chosen to come to the board to make corrections. Students read the sentences, looked for an error and corrected it. Students cheered when they properly corrected difficult errors such as the title of a poem or an article. Some became so conscious of their errors that they would search for the paper they had already handed in to make the correction! Each grouping of sentences focused on common errors and would touch on use of quotations, standard English or proper treatment of book titles. This activity progressed and became more sophisticated through the duration of the research. The students were able to apply their daily practiced skills to a variety of other written genres.

The often lost art of letter writing was utilized in purposeful ways throughout the action research plan. Different types of letter writing were taught and modeled extensively as the need arose, such as friendly letters, thank you letters, and invitations. When guest speakers or readers would come in, students would write authentic thank you letters. Friendly letters were used when students wrote to parents, the president, and to each other. Students would request letter writing paper and envelopes to take home so they could work on their letter writing skills outside

of class. Students were highly motivated to use their writing skills in this functional manner due to the excitement and anticipation of receiving written responses back.

The relevance of letter writing and friendly letters in particular was also reinforced through a pen pal program. Students in Classroom B and Classroom D began writing to each other. The students cherished receiving letters from their pen pals and eagerly awaited the arrival of new ones. Each time the classes responded to their pen pals, the students would go through each of the stages in the writing process. Grammar skills and mechanics were reinforced through this meaningful writing activity. Different types of sentence structures were used. Asking questions and using appropriate punctuation marks were taught and modeled as mini lessons when the need arose. The researchers' lessons were based upon genuine student need. The children were made aware of how written communication is intended for an audience. Students were motivated to do their best because the audience was authentic. Collaboration also played into the pen pal program. Both sets of pen pals met with writing mentors in their own building. On several occasions, these groups worked together to go through the stages of the writing process when writing responses.

Pen pal correspondences continued. At the conclusion of the action research, a writing celebration was planned between Classroom B and Classroom D. The classes united to greet one another and applaud their writing achievements. This celebration was devoted to sharing stories and other published works. Students' self-perceptions were nurtured by the positive comments and the praise they received from their friendly audiences. The delight they felt was apparent by the expression of merriment on their faces. The celebration concluded with a relevant and meaningful collaborative writing activity. The pen pals worked together using their writing skills to create greeting cards for a local nursing home. This activity encouraged the foundations for future community service activities.

Students from Classroom A became pen pals with students from Classroom C. These students also enjoyed writing letters; however, they used more elaboration in the creation of their letters. The high school students assumed the role of writing mentor. When they wrote their response letters to the third graders, they modeled appropriate writing. As these pen pals became comfortable with each other, they became much more obvious about errors they saw. When researchers read the letters, is was not uncommon to see phrases such as, "P.S. You misspelled Chicago." Students looked forward to receiving letters from their pen pals. Students became disappointed when letters did not arrive in a timely manner.

Students showed a lot of enthusiasm, not only by the amount of writing they produced, but also through pictures drawn for their pen pals. They took their assignments very seriously. The weather was cold and windy on the day of a scheduled visit. The researcher expressed hesitation about walking to Site A- Classroom A due to the weather, but the students did not want to let down their pen pals. They made the trip without complaint. The high school students wrote reflections following the activities with their pen pals to express what they liked and did not like about the exercise (Appendix G). The researcher also asked them for suggestions about how they could improve future activities.

The students were able to meet and work collaboratively. The older students supported the younger students who wrote fictional stories for a young author's contest. The high school LD students took charge and led activities when the students me. This was a role that many of them had not previously experienced. Students ate snacks and had pictures taken to remember each meeting.

As the need arose throughout the intervention, mini-lessons for standard English were presented. As the teachers noticed errors in the use of irregular verbs, a week was spent using the verbs correctly. When the teachers wanted to see more clarity in class writing, work began

on the use of adjectives. Examples of other mini-lessons presented involved punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure, organizing thoughts, appropriate parts of a letter, and proofreading. Students were able to demonstrate understanding of these lessons through the transfer of skills into other written genres.

Throughout the intervention, there was a continuation of previously implemented activities, thus allowing students ample opportunities to practice and develop a sense of comfort with writing. The final week consisted of postintervention surveys, writing celebrations, and collecting writing samples to use as data for comparisons. Throughout the entire intervention the researchers provided appropriate modeling of all writing activities.

The researchers gathered writing samples throughout the action research . The last week of the intervention, student postsurveys (Appendix A and B) were filled out and parent surveys (Appendix F) were sent home.

Site A Classroom A

Interventions unique to Site A Classroom A consisted of the several other forms of writing activities. Cooperatively grouped students created a list to answer the question, "What makes writing fun?" The groups shared their thoughts and created a classroom poster from these lists. The poster still hangs in the classroom as a reminder.

At the beginning of the year, students wrote their names using block letters on a large sheet of paper. All students created a list of ten sentences about themselves. This became their personal autobiography. Then they wrote the sentences on each block letter. Correct spelling and sentences structure was expected, as sharing their writing with parents on open house night would soon follow. Students made an effort to create well-written and correctly spelled sentences. Students added personal touches by drawing pictures that illustrated hobbies or interests.

Two guest speakers visited Classroom A during Weeks Nine and Ten. The first speaker was a foreign exchange student from the Ukraine. The student shared her writing with students. She provided each student with a new name tag written in her native language. Students enthusiastically taped their Ukrainian names to their desks. Many names remained taped to desk tops. She also shared her experience of learning our language and using our writing conventions. She shared some words and phrases she found difficult to translate or understand. The second speaker was a parent of a student who shared his experience as a missionary in Chile. He brought with him several journals he had kept during the time he spent in Chile. He read parts of his journal to the students to allow them to hear the details of his experience. A discussion about his reasons for keeping the journals was initiated. He talked about wanting to remember everything he had done, especially the people he had met. He shared his journal to emphasize his love of the people he worked with and why he wanted to remember them. He also told the students he wrote very detailed accounts so he could remember everything about his experience in Chile.

Site A Classroom B

Writing activities specific to Site A Classroom B consisted of first grade level writing. Week One, the interventions were explained to the students as each intervention was implemented. Site A Classroom B did not conduct a student survey prior to beginning the action plan due to the fact that the survey was developmentally inappropriate for "beginning of the year" first graders.

The writing process was introduced through an activity called special persons. In this activity, one student was chosen to be special person for the day. The class brainstormed questions to find out more about the special person. The class then asked the questions and dictated responses to the researcher who recorded the story on chart paper. This chart was the

rough draft for the special person's report. The chart was then reread by the students and edited with the researcher's guidance and modeling. The revised charts were typed up into story format and compiled for a class book (which turned out to be one of the most popular books of the year). Students were highly motivated to help in the planning, writing, editing, and sharing of the special person's reports due to the fact that they were the focused on them. Each student had a chance to be a special person. It was noted by the researcher that students correctly used many of the words from the special person's reports in their daily writing due to the fact that many of the same words and sentence structures were repeated throughout each person's report. The researcher also observed that students were much more aware of the writing process than they had been in previous years due to the extensive modeling. When the class began writing stories, the writing process did not have to be directly and explicitly taught since the students were so familiar with it.

Different types of journaling were also introduced. Diary-type journals which enabled students to have control over what they wished to write about were used. Students wrote in their journals daily. Four different students would be allowed to share what they wrote each day. Some students wrote about their own lives, while others worked on stories or poems in their journals. If a student wrote a story in their journal, the story would be edited and published. The young author would then share their work. On days when we had a change in schedule and did not have time for the daily journaling, many students showed remorse, and the researcher often heard groans or requests to work on the journal during an indoor recess or free time. The fact the students had control over their choice of what to write about was a motivating component for the success of journaling. Through this daily "self expressive" journaling, students worked on writing skills in a real and functional setting while enjoying and developing a love for written expression.

Several other peer collaborative writing activities were also used throughout action research. With the fourth grade pals, students made posters to advertise favorite books, designed and wrote about healthy foods, and made collaborative crossgrade class books. Peer collaboration was also employed within the class. Cooperative groups made factual books using things learned during specific units. Poems and songs were also written in groups or pairs. Learning is more internalized when one has to teach it to someone else. The researcher tried to provide relevant avenues to encourage writing skills through written projects.

Site B Classroom D

Site B utilized a variety of other writing activities during the course of the intervention. Students began writing in pocket journals during Week One and continued using the journals throughout the intervention. This type of journal involved writing in a small memo book. Pocket journals were filled with student and teacher dialogue, which focused upon appropriate letter writing techniques. The researcher gained insight into each students' writing development through these journals. In addition, the pocket journals proved to be useful assessment tools. Due to the personal nature of the pocket journals, a sense of trust was established between the students and researcher.

Students also used a poetry notebook, which was another type of journal initiated to expose them to other styles of writing. Students placed a weekly class poem in their notebook and responded to the main idea in journal format. Other areas addressed and explored were rhymes, nouns, verbs, punctuation, word patterns, and independent and partner poetry writing. Students also performed the poems cooperatively in oral readings, finger plays acting out the actions, and songs or raps. The students incorporated their natural ability to be "hams" while performing the poems.

As the students continued to practice the stages of the writing process, a new focus was introduced. In anticipation of a young author's writing initiative, a published author was invited to give insight as to how an author writes a book. Students were able to see firsthand the procedures necessary for writing a book. Applying what they learned, students wrote stories and recipe books, incorporating narrative and expository skills that were modeled by the guest speaker and researcher. Students then developed a young author's product for a local and state contest.

Site C Classroom C

Writing activities specifically developed for high school LD students as Site C were utilized through the course of the intervention. During Week Two students began writing in conversation journals. This activity continued during the entire intervention. Each student received a composition book that would serve as the student's journal. The researcher at Classroom C started the process by giving each student a copy of a friendly letter. The letter detailed how the researcher spent the summer. Students were asked specific questions about their summer vacation. Guidelines for writing in the conversation journals were given. Students were to respond in friendly letter format with a salutation and closing. They were expected to answer the researcher's questions and ask a minimum of one question in return which would keep the "conversation" flowing. The conversation journals were instrumental in establishing a bond between the researcher and students. The researcher was able to gain insightful information, and the journals became a window into the lives of the students. They often wrote about their interests, families, classes, part-time jobs, and monumental milestones in the life of a high school student such as obtaining a driver's license, getting a class ring or going to a school dance.

As the aforementioned activities continued and progressed, the researcher built on that foundation by emphasizing the relevance of real-life writing skills. A guest speaker was invited

to the classroom during week seven. The guest speaker was a former student who is currently a corporal in the United States Marine Corp. Prior to his arrival, students used a graphic organizer to formulate questions to ask him. In addition to responding to students' questions, he described his duties and clarified a common misconception. He revealed that he did not anticipate using writing skills after graduating. He informed them that contrary to what he once thought, he uses writing a lot in his job in the form of taking notes and completing forms. He estimated that he writes three times more now than he did when in high school.

During Weeks Seven through Eleven students completed practice job applications for businesses in the community. Proper grammar, punctuation, spelling, and neatness were emphasized. The researcher took advantage of relevant opportunities which arose in order to encourage written correspondence. Students wrote thank you notes to the guest speaker and also to the owners of a local business who sponsored the newspaper in education program. Students also used computer programs to create get well cards, birthday cards, Christmas cards, and invitations for their pen pals and others.

Due to inclement weather, school was canceled several days near the end of the intervention. This created the need to deviate from the intended plan. As part of the intervention, the researcher intended to instruct students on writing their own autobiographies using a variety of graphic organizers to plan their stories. The researcher at Site C decided to postpone that project until after the intervention was concluded.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

The following data reflects surveys administered at the conclusion of the action research. The researchers distributed the same surveys given at the beginning of the intervention to the students and parents, with an added question on the parent survey which addressed whether or not parents felt the intervention impacted their child's motivation to write. Faculty members

were not surveyed at this time, as no relevant information regarding their insights was deemed necessary.

The purpose of conducting postintervention surveys was to determine whether the students had been impacted by the intervention. Data collected postintervention were compared and contrasted to the data gathered at the beginning of the intervention. An in-depth analysis of the data is provided along with graphs that correlate with the collected data. Then, conclusions and recommendations are gleaned from the data gathered, depicting anecdotal suggestions based upon how the intervention impacted the students.

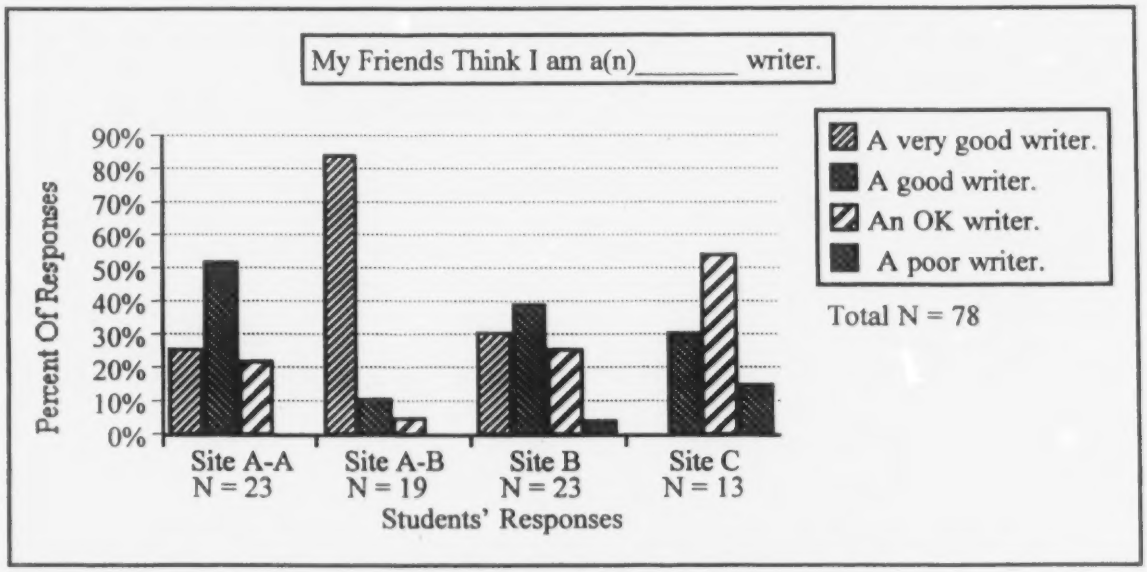

Figure 1. Responses to "My friends think I am a(n)_____writer."

Figure 1 represents the data collected from student's postintervention. In the survey "WHAT DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WRITING?" (Appendix B), student's again responded to how they felt their friends viewed them as writers. This question depicts the impact the intervention had on student growth with their writing development. Student impressions of how they think their friends view them are a key indicator into how they view themselves as writers. As presented in Chapter 3, student motivation to write is directly linked to how students view

themselves as writers. The results from this surveyed question were amazingly varied between each site. The choices were a) *a very good writer,* b) *a good writer,* c) *an OK writer,* and d) *a poor writer.* Twenty-three students at Site A- Classroom A responded to this question. preintervention questionnaires indicated 61% of the students viewed themselves as *very good writers* while only 9% viewed themselves as *ok writers*. However, postintervention questionnaires indicated a dramatic change. Only 26% of the students viewed themselves as *very good writers*, and 22% viewed themselves as *ok writers*. This radical change could be due in part to a newfound understanding of what makes a good writer. Site A- Classroom B had the most positive results with 84% of students surveyed stated they thought their friends viewed them as *very good writers.* Eleven percent said their friends viewed them as *good writers,* and five percent rated themselves as *ok writers.* However, it must be noted that students at this site were not surveyed at the preintervention stage. The researcher felt the survey was developmentally inappropriate when the intervention began. When compared to the preintervention data, postintervention information suggests that students are reflecting more about their writing than at the beginning of the intervention. Twenty-three students at Site B were surveyed. Results indicate fewer students view themselves as *very good writers*, 31% compared to 46% previously. Postsurveys report that 39% view themselves as *good writers*, compared to only 17% at the beginning of the action research. *Ok writers* remained similar, 30% compared to 26% postintervention. The number of students who viewed themselves as *poor writers* was reduced by half, from 8% to 4%. Although the number of students who viewed themselves as *very good writers* decreased, an overall increase in all other areas indicate the students were positively influenced by the intervention. Furthermore, the fact that students are reflecting more now at the end of the intervention indicates students are thinking more about their writing. Thirteen students from Site C responded to the same question. This represents a decrease in the number

of participants from the original fourteen. One student opted to begin home study a few weeks after the intervention began. In response to the question, none of the students said that their friends viewed them as *very good writers*. Thirty-one percent of the students reported that they believed their friends viewed them as *good writers*. Prior to the intervention, only 14% said that their friends viewed them to be *good writers*. Fifty-four percent of the students said that their friends viewed them as *OK writers* compared to 43% at the onset of the intervention. Fifteen percent of the students believed that their friends viewed them as *poor writers*. Prior to the intervention, 29% of the students said that their friends viewed them as *poor writers*. When these results were compared to the preintervention survey, it appeared to show that students had less intense feelings about per perceptions. Fewer students chose the *very good writer* and *poor writer* responses than at the preintervention phase. The number of students who responded that their friends viewed them as *poor writers* was almost reduced by half. In general, the students' answers fell increasingly in the middle range of responses.

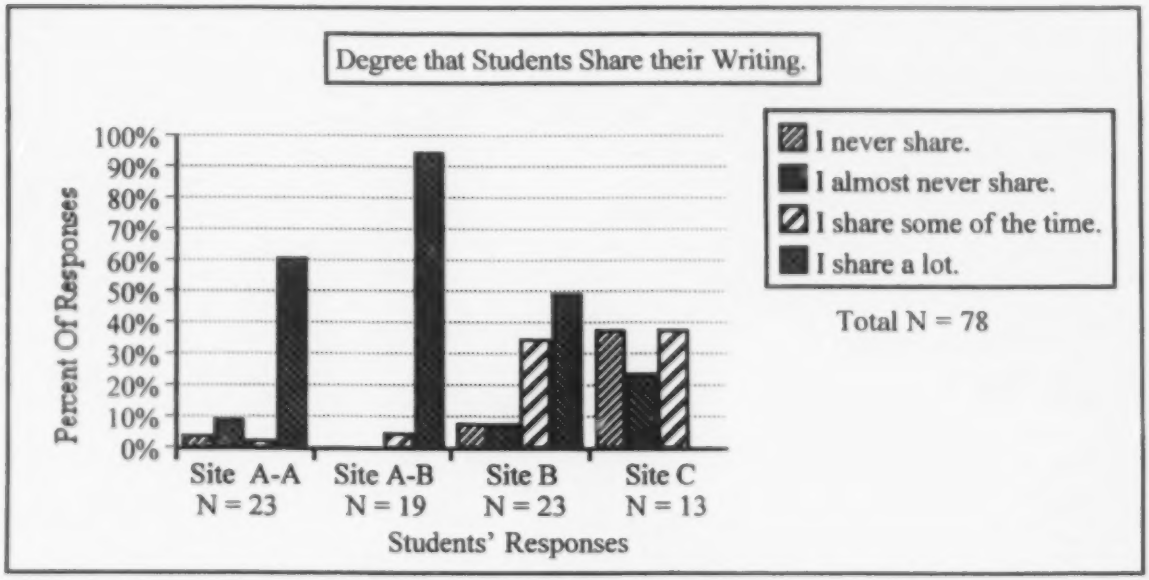

Figure 2. Responses to "I share what I write with my family."

The data collected for Figure 2 was based upon student impressions of how often they share their writing products with those around them. This is a key component in supporting the action research because students who are motivated and perceive themselves as good writers tend to have more of a desire to share their writing successes with those around them. The focus of the action research was to introduce and immerse students in a variety of writing genres to develop a sense of comfort and trigger a desire to write. Site A- Classroom A, Site A- Classroom B and Site B results were blatantly positive, whereas, data from Site C indicated that the students were not as comfortable sharing their written products. The researchers firmly believe that the social ramifications of peer pressure skewed the results at Site C. Students may not want others to know that they are sharing their written work for fear of being belittled by their peers. Once again, the data strongly support the positive impact that the action research had on student writing. While *I never share* and *I almost never share* remained similar pre- and postsurvey, there was a significant increase in students who said they *share a lot*. Presurvey indicated 27% of the students *shared a lot*, while post survey showed and increase to 61%. *I never share* remained similar, 5% and 4% respectively. *I almost never share* increased from 5% to 9% postsurvey. The researchers believe the increase in the category of *sharing a lot* was due to activities within the classroom involving peer editing, collaborating and working with pen pals. Site A- Classroom B, while not participating in a presurvey, indicated that they *share a lot*, 95%. Only 5% indicated they *shared some of the time*. At first grade, much of the work involves small group and large group sharing. This is supported by these results. Site B pre- and postsurvey questions show little change in all areas but *sharing some of the time*. *Sharing some of the time* increased from 25% to 35%. There was a decrease from 12% to 8% pre- to postsurvey. Almost *never share* also decrease from 13% to 8%. *I share a lot* actually decreased by 1%, from 50% to 49%. While the researchers are encouraged to see a decrease in the areas of *never* and *almost*

never sharing, they are less encouraged by the results showing *sharing some of the time* and *a lot of the time*. Site C results indicated that 38% *never share*, which is an increase from the presurvey which indicated 22% of the students *never share*. Seven percent of the students prior to the intervention said they *almost never share*, while postsurveys revealed 24% of the students *almost never share*. Presurvey results indicated 64% of the students *share some of the time*, while postdata gathered shows 38% of the students *share some of the time*. Students who say they *share a lot* decreased from 7% preintervention to 0% postintervention. The researchers feel that perhaps the students were on writing overload, and this would explain the drop in positive responses. It was further felt that high school students do not feel it is cool to share their work with either peers or parents

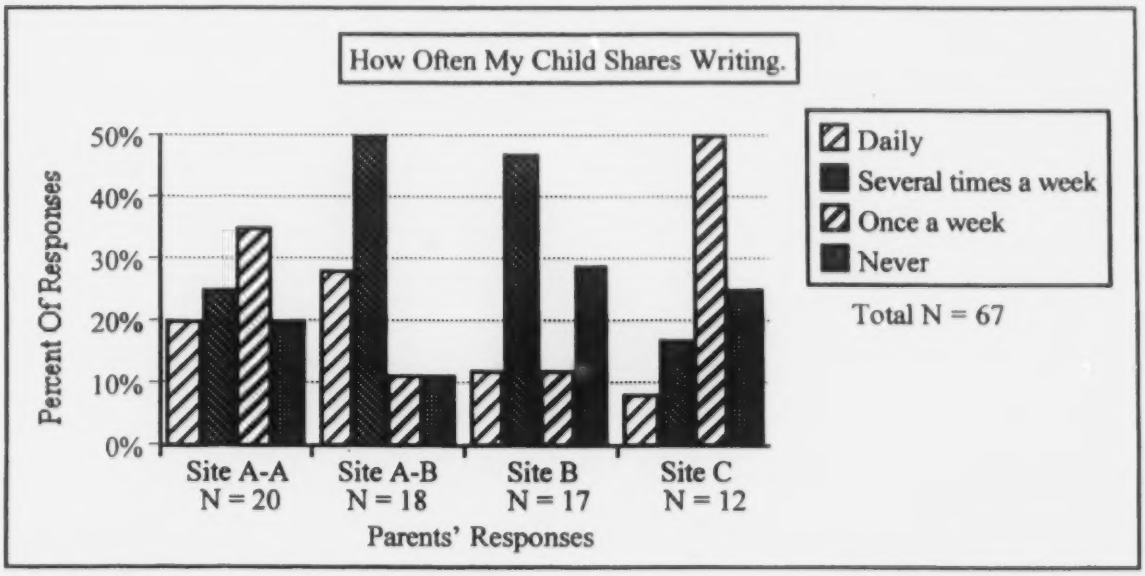

Figure 3. Parents' Response to Survey Inquiry

Another key indicator to evaluate the impact of the intervention on student writing was the amount of student sharing of written products at home. Both Sites A- Classroom A and Classroom B data indicate a decline in the frequency of student sharing at home. Results at Site

B and C were comparable to each other in reference to those areas that showed an increase or decrease. Site A- Classroom A students who shared their work *daily* with their family declined from 40% to 20%. S*everal times a week* sharing showed similar pre- and postdata: 32% then 25%. On the positive side, parents indicated that 35% of them felt their students were sharing their work *at least once a week*, which was an increase from 14%. Twenty percent of the parents felt their student *never* shared their work, indicating and increase from the presurvey of 14%. While these results may not reflect positively on this action research, a decrease in sharing could be due to the timely distribution of the surveys. Presurveys were sent home at the beginning of the school year when expectations are high and a new year is exciting. Whereas the postsurveys were sent home prior to Christmas break when families have many commitments and may feel overwhelmed by school responsibilities. Site A- Classroom B also showed a decrease in *daily* sharing from 40% to 28%. However, there was a slight increase in the *several times a week* sharing from 45% to 50%. *Once a week* sharing occurred 5% postsurvey, compared to 11% pre survey. Those parents who felt their students *never* shared remained relatively the same at 11% compared to presurvey 10%. It is felt that younger students are generally more eager to share their work frequently with their family, supporting the 78% of parents who responded favorably. Site B showed an increase in *daily* sharing, 8% to 12%. *Several times a week* sharing also showed an increase from 33% to 47%. On a positive note, those parents who felt their child *never* shared decreased from 42% to 29%. Although there were more parents who responded to the post survey, which skewed the comparative results somewhat, the fact that more parents responded at the end of the intervention conclusively indicates a positive impact. The data collected from Site B indicated an overall positive impact the intervention had on student writing. Site C parents responded similarly pre- and postsurvey. Seven percent presurvey compared to 8% postsurvey indicated the student was sharing *daily*. There was an increase in response to

several times a week, from 7% to 17%. *Once a week* sharing occurred 50% of the time, compared to 43% presurvey. Only 25% of the parents said their student *never* shared, a decrease from 43%. While the increases or decreases are not overwhelming, the fact that fewer parents reported that their students *never* share can be interpreted as positive growth.

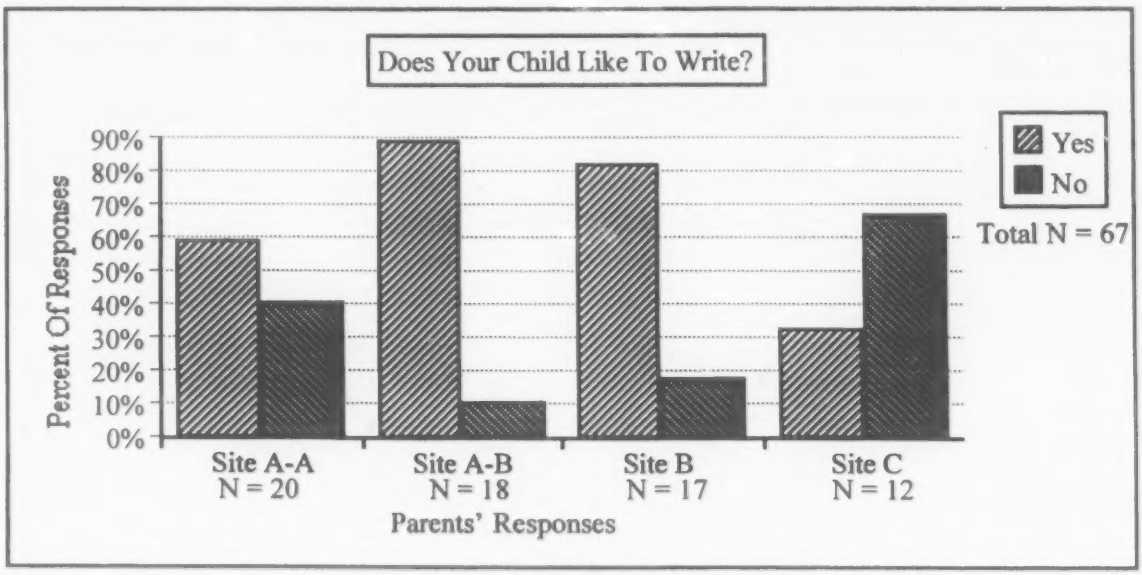

Figure 4. Student Responses to "Does your child like to write?"

Parents are a crucial component to student writing development and desire to write. The data displayed in Figure 3 depict parent impressions of whether they thought their children enjoyed writing more at the conclusion of the intervention than at the beginning of the action research. Overall, most parents at all four sites perceived their children to like writing more than before the course of the intervention took place. Site A- Classroom A had somewhat conflicting results when compared to the other sites because the *yes* responses actually declined at the conclusion of the research. The results at Site C declined at the end of the intervention as well. On a positive note, Site B had an increase of parent responses at the conclusion of the action research. At the beginning of the intervention, only 12 of the 24 parents surveyed responded. Whereas, at the conclusion of the intervention, 17 of the 23 parents surveyed responded. Site

A- Classroom A parents responded that 59% felt that their child liked to write, compared to 64% previously. Forty-one percent indicated that their child does not like to write, while only 36% responded previously that their child did not like to write. Responses from parents on these surveys indicated, while their student did not necessarily like to write, they felt the intervention was a positive experience, and they also felt their writing skills had improved. Some parents even cited examples of their child writing letters on their own. This was something that had not occurred prior to the action research. Site A- Classroom B responses indicate an increase in their child's desire to write from 75% to 89%. This is also reflected in a decrease of *no* responses to DOES YOUR CHILD LIKE TO WRITE? from 25% to 11%. Site B parent responses are similar to Site A-B. An increase of *yes* responses, 64% to 82%, and a decrease in *no* responses 36% to 18%. Researchers believe the results were impacted by a greater response from parents at Site B. Stimulating parent involvement is an indicator to positively impacting student desire to write. Site C presurvey response said 43% liked to write, whereas only 33% responded that their children like to write postsurvey. Consequently *no* responses increased from 57% to 67% postsurvey. The researchers felt the students were required to write too much too soon. Their attitudes and feelings at the high school level are more defined, and they needed more time to explore their writing skills.

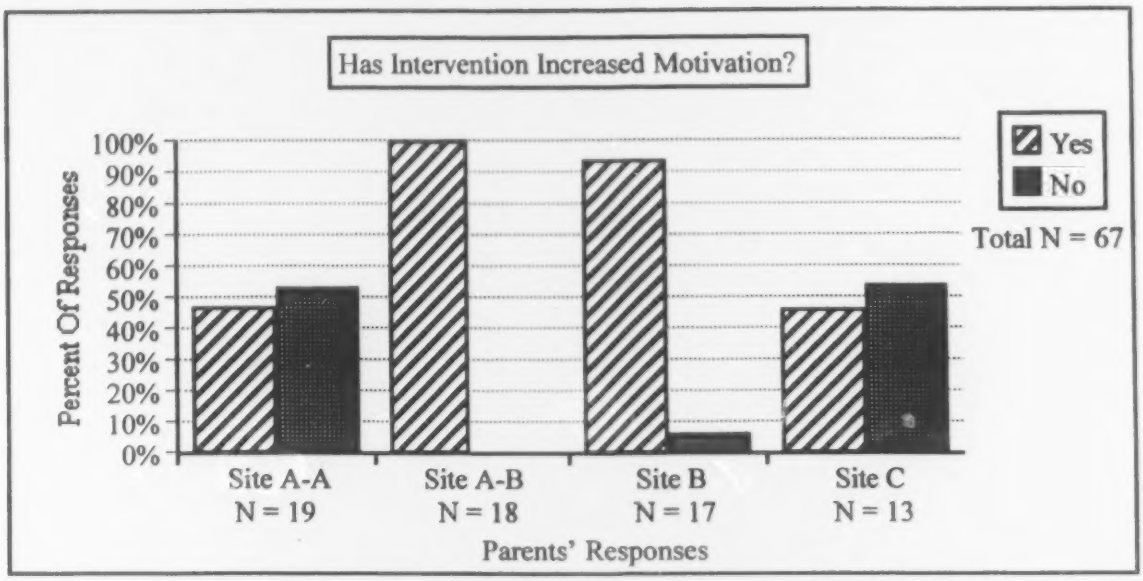

Figure 5. Parents' Perception of Intervention

Figure 5 represents the data collected from parents based upon their perception of whether or not the intervention increased their child's motivation to write. Again, the data reflect the difference between early elementary students and upper elementary to high school students in that the results were overwhelmingly positive for the early elementary sites and about even results for the upper elementary and high school students. Site A- Classroom B's 100% *yes* results indicate the intervention significantly impacted student writing. Again, many key variables come into play when interpreting the data. Writer exhaustion, peer pressure, and the lack of parent-student communication were among the top variables the researchers feel impacted the data. Another issue to consider is, perhaps, parents are reflecting more about their child's writing as students progress through the grade levels, thus parent expectations are increasing. Obviously, the data from Figure 5 was an evaluative measure of the action research and its impact on student motivation to write. Site A- Classroom A parents indicated that 47% of them felt the intervention increased their child's motivation to write. Several parents responded on the questionnaire how pleased they were to find their student writing letters to family and friends.

These letters were written without parental encouragement, therefore indicating the student was self-motivated to complete the task. It should also be noted that the difference of one parent opinion would have changed the results from 47% responding the intervention increased motivation, to 53%. The results from Site A- Classroom B were overwhelmingly positive. One hundred percent of the parents who responded to the survey question reported that there was an increase in motivation due to the intervention. These results are representative of the students' age group. The foundation of writing skills is traditionally developed during first grade. The results at Site B were similar to those at Site A- Classroom B. In response to the same question, 94% of the parents reported that their student's motivation increased. Only six percent of the parents felt that their student's motivation did not increase. This small number of negative responses are significant when reflecting how effective the intervention was on increasing student motivation. The fact that parents are reflecting more about their child's desire to write is a key indicator of positive growth for both students and parents. The results at Site C were almost identical to the results at Site A- Classroom A. Forty-six percent of the parents surveyed reported that motivation increased due to the intervention. Fifty-four percent of the parents said that the intervention did not increase motivation to write. The researchers felt that although the results at Site C do not appear to be positive, there was, indeed, some progress. Since the students at that site are high school age, their attitudes and feelings about writing are more dominant. It is more difficult to heighten motivation of older students. The fact that almost half of the parents responded positively is encouraging.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Site A Classroom A

At the conclusion of the intervention I wholeheartedly feel that students in my classroom are better writers as a result of the action research. This is realized through the use of

collaboration, modeling, relevance and an intense focus on my part in teaching to all aspects of writing.

I had a sense that having another student for support made writing comfortable for the students. A sigh of relief could be heard when a new genre or a more detailed organizer had been introduced if I said, "Let's use clocks for partners today." An echo of "Yes!" rang through the classroom. I felt this was a sign that students wanted to complete the task at hand, but needed the support of each other to accomplish the task. If given the choice, all of students but one would choose to work with a partner. How do I know? One of the persuasive writing prompts I had my students write to was, "Which way do you prefer to learn, with a group or by yourself?" My students were excited to work with each other. They knew it helped them if they did not know something and that it provided more ideas from which to draw. I also conclude from these reactions that they were motivated to write.

I was pleased to see and hear excellent collaboration occurring. My students became experts in the language needed to explain the parts necessary for a well written paragraph. I could hear them tell one another "You need another main idea here....This is where you put your minor detail." or "Your wrap up sentence needs to include your major details." It was exciting to hear them talk to each other the same way I had taught the lesson. My students supported one another and were able to find someone who could help them on a specific area if I was busy working with a student. I observed my students helping one another create a well-written topic. Several students early on had difficulty writing their first sentence without using *because*. I had modeled how to write a topic sentence, students had shared their sentences and we looked at samples. Still I had students who were not ready to write a topic sentence. The rest of the class pitched in and helped those in need. I can only conclude that because my students knew the process well, they would in turn be better writers and motivated to write.

Each year I spend several days sharing past standardized test samples and actually teach my students how to score the writing. I feel it gives them a goal for their own writing, and they can see what good and bad writing looks like! They would often laugh at misspelled words and sloppy handwriting. Presenting these samples as models gave me something to draw from when I collaborated with my students about their writing. Using this approach gave me an opportunity to point out weak areas and support students by telling them what area they needed to concentrate on improving. It provided short-term writing goals for each piece. If goals are achieved, motivation has transpired. When I introduced writing with details, I told my students I had some really good treats for them. I then asked the students if they wanted some of the treats. Everyone was ready, places set! "Great! I hope you all like liver and onions!" The looks on their faces were priceless! This illustrated to them, words like *good* and *nice* do not tell us what we need to know. I would often tell them their writing was "...too liver and onions..." They knew what I meant. All this modeling and constant use of our writing vocabulary, I believe made writing more familiar and even easy for my students. One of the biggest risks I took involved modeling a five paragraph essay using the organizer. Had I been asked at the beginning of my research how many students I thought would be able to achieve this, I would have answered two or three. I can report 15 or more of my students, I believe, can comfortably write such an essay. Some essays are more elaborate than others, but they are organized and stick to the topic. The ideas are clear and concise. I reviewed their state tests and was extremely pleased with the results. When I asked a fifth grade teacher to review them, she responded by saying she felt that perhaps as many as ten of my students would be in the exceeds writing category. This would be a significant improvement as last year only six of sixty-plus students achieved this ranking. This certainly supports the use of modeling and graphic organizers to enhance the students' writing success. Because of mini-lessons on standard English skills, students began to

notice errors in writing and speech. My students took great joy in catching each other using incorrect irregular verbs. One student made it his personal mission to "catch" these errors; he even kept a running tally of errors! He would announce "He *saw* the movie, not *seen*!" or "Ouch! you are hurting my ears!" This told me students were learning, listening and transferring positive writing habits to all situations. A few students even decided to correct a few of their high school pals' letters.

Relevant writing assignments were the most motivating for my students. It was not as structured as the essay writing and therefore less stressful. The first day my students were given their conversation journals with a greeting from me, they eagerly wrote in them. Students were energized each morning, as part of their routine, to read what I had responded in their journal. Many students would get so excited about what they wrote that they could not wait for the me to read it. They would often ask, "Have you read my journal yet? I wrote about my trip today." If students asked a burning question of me, the next day they would enthusiastically ask, "Do you have my journal?" This type of communication even extended to my home. Many of my girls began to write to the my third grade daughter! They thought themselves to be quite special, as they announced, "Has Kelsey written me back?" This news spread around the room, and soon other little girls were asking if they could write Kelsey too. The excitement of communicating with someone else, especially their teacher's daughter, was very motivating. Although I only required each student to write in their conversation journal once a week, almost half wrote to me two or more times. I kept a running tally each week of journals as they were turned in for report card purposes. One of my academically low students enjoyed writing to me. She spent a lot of time reading over what she had written. I could be sure to be questioned about her journal! She was one who filled a journal. She would beg "Please read my journal now?" or "Can you write me back today?" This transferred later into writing letters to others using an

acute awareness for spelling that did not seem evident at the beginning of the school year. The relevant tasks certainly motivated this student.

As for myself, I was not sure I was up to the task or responsibility of creating better writers. It had been an achievement that had alluded me year after year. I put all my effort into supporting the writing process, finding writing prompts that would stimulate the young minds of my third graders and creating tasks that were important for them. The electricity that went through my room when it was time to meet with pen pals was intense. Some students could hardly stay focused on a task before their pen pals arrived. They rarely had trouble finding something to write to their pen pals about. The fact-that they would periodically meet their pen pal- kept them writing. I truly believe my students are better writers today because I approached teaching writing using this action research.

Reflecting upon what I would do differently, I know I need to spend more time writing narratives. More practice in this area will make this genre of writing easier for my students. Another activity I would continue is pen pals writing. A larger class of students would make this more pleasurable for all the students. I would also put more emphasis in writing across the curriculum. We did write for math, science and social studies, but not as much as I would have liked. A long term goal would include building bridges to other grade levels using this same organizer. It would make all the early groundwork obsolete, and I could focus more on details and elaboration and less on structure and focus.

I will continue to use the organizer as I feel it is one that lends itself to all writing, is easy to use and is easy to create. The organizer provided a focus and structure I had not experienced with other organizers. The expansion, elaboration, and the lack of "disjointedness" in student's writing was a favorable outcome! Furthermore, the organizer is teacher friendly and easy to utilize in other curricular areas.

In an effort to improve this action research project, rubrics and guidelines for evaluating students' writing need to be created. Not having an authentic tool to chart progress made it difficult to support some conclusions. Improvement could also be made through educating parents in the use of the graphic organizer. This would benefit the student and teacher. This would support the student when assignments came home, and it would help the teacher remediate problems using the parents as tutors.

Site A Classroom B

I am pleased with the positive effect this intervention had on my students' writing skills. Students were writing in paragraphs that included a topic sentence, supporting details, and a closing sentence before the end of the intervention, which would have been before half of the school year was over! In addition, students did not display negative attitudes towards writing as seen in past years. Students were able to have some choice and freedom in writing assignments and topics, collaboration was used, different types of writing and the use of graphic organizers was modeled more extensively, and the purpose of writing was made relevant to the students.

During journaling, students were permitted to write about their own lives, create stories, and compose poems. When time did not permit, students would complain about not being able to write in their journals. On several occasions students stayed in the work on stories or their journals at their own request. The researcher concludes that the students enjoyed and often needed this writing outlet. Student choice was a motivating component for the success of journaling.

I believe the use of collaboration enhanced students motivation to write by allowing them to work with peers and learn and grow with one another. Not only did the idea of being allowed to work with a peer excite students, but they also worked hard to impress their peers. The pen pal program, which factored into collaboration was successful. Students eagerly awaited

responses from letters written. Students were motivated to do their best work because the audience was authentic. When my students were able to meet their pen pals for a writing celebration towards the end of the intervention, the enthusiasm for writing was apparent by the expression of merriment on their faces. Students' self perceptions were nurtured by the positive comments and praise they received from their friendly audiences. When my students returned from the writing celebration, they wrote about whether they enjoyed this activity ad whether they though it was worthwhile. Not one of my students had anything negative to write about the experience. The students' comments made were highly in favor of doing another activity similar to this one.

I also contend that extensive modeling and the use of graphic organizers aids writing skills and makes writing easier and more enjoyable for students which in turn motivates students to write. When asked how they felt about using the graphic organizers, students' responses were approving. Several students mentioned how simple it is to plan your story or paragraph using graphic organizers.

Through the intervention, I stressed the relevance of writing to real life. I do not have any collection tools to accurately reflect if my students understood the relevance of writing. I can report, through observation, that during meaningful, functional writing activities students were on task and were motivated to write as evidenced through their lack of negative behavior and their willingness to participate with no coaxing. I believe my students understand that it is important to be a writer and that writing takes effort. I am not sure a six or seven-year-old can grasp the concept of relevance.

Future researchers might find the following recommendations useful. Prior to the intervention, baseline data of writing samples need to be gathered, especially at the pre- and postphases of the action research plan. Along with these writing samples, reliable and valid

rubrics need to be constructed in order to best gauge the success of this action research. The collection of writing samples during the intervention proved to be cumbersome, and the lack of appropriate rubrics was discouraging. The time needed to create rubrics could be a burden on time management. In short, pre- and postwriting samples with appropriate rubrics need to be gathered and used.

I feel educators must work to build the home-school connection. My other recommendation is to hold an informational meeting with the parents to explain the writing process to them. An explanation of graphic organizers would also be helpful at this meeting. Ultimately, the importance of writing daily and sharing written pieces would also be discussed.

Site B Classroom D

As I reflect upon the intervention I conducted in my classroom, I am overwhelmingly pleased with the positive influence the action plan had on my students' writing development. The odds were definitely stacked against us in the beginning of the intervention. The classroom make-up of students consisted of many volatile, troubled students who lacked appropriate social skills for peer interaction; basically they are a group that dislikes each other. With a lot of hard work, blood (there actually was some blood), sweat, and tears (mine and theirs), the students were able to eventually function collaboratively. However, we overcame the many challenges using a variety of cooperative learning strategies, and despite the many odds, we prevailed.

At the beginning of the intervention, a variety of surveys were given to gather data supporting our problem. When I surveyed parents, only 12 of the 24 parents returned their completed surveys; even after three attempts. This low parent response indicates to me that the parents were not either aware of their child's writing or it was not a priority. During the middle of the intervention, one student moved to another school to receive behavior disordered services. This student no longer participated in the action research due to geographic reasons. At the

conclusion of the action research, 17 of the 23 parents returned their postdata surveys. I strongly believe parents were impacted positively through the intervention because of the number of postdata responses. Some parents even wrote comments about their child's desire to write now that they have had the opportunities to practice. The parents were surprised to see the positive change in the students' desire to write.

The students were surveyed, as well, at the beginning of the year. Student responses differed between pre- and postdata. Most students seemed to respond impulsively at the beginning of the year, whereas, postintervention responses seemed to be harsher at the conclusion of the action research. I firmly believe students were more aware of writing due to the exposure to a variety of written genres. Students also had ample opportunity to practice and develop their writing. Thus, giving them prior knowledge to reflect upon in their writing. I definitely believe my students were able to see the "big picture" when communicating in written form. The fact that the data indicated an overall decline supports the conclusion that my students are reflecting more about their writing. I believe this result to be a positive conclusion because students are incorporating metacognitive thinking in their writing. The steps taken to get to a finished product are more important to developing learners than the finished product itself.

A variety of strategies were introduced and practiced by the students. Of the many writing activities conducted, I believe writing to a pen pal as one of the most effective in developing student desire to write. The students were able to see the relevance to writing due to having an actual "living" audience, who eventually became a friend. As the person evaluating their development, I was amazed to see the growth in sentence structure, supporting details, and sequence. Although we had mini-lessons and did daily oral language activities to reinforce these writing skills, the actual transfer occurred when writing to our pen pals. Another stimulating component to the pen pal program included writing to two different classrooms, each

representing a different grade level and different geographic region. We were able to actually meet our local pen pals, which was a key motivator for writing other types of genres. During our meeting, each student shared their writing products with their pal and celebrated writing successes. Being able to share written products was such a significant factor to stimulating beginning writers.

Another winning segment to the intervention I used in my classroom involved each student writing a young author's story. I was able to introduce an amazingly successful graphic organizer during the first quarter of the intervention. This graphic organizer was easy for me to implement into my daily curriculum, allowing the students the time to become familiar with the steps. Then, I invited a published author into the room to discuss and model the necessary steps and procedures it takes to write a published product. The students were shocked to hear that editing can take a long time to complete. The students were able to write their stories with surprisingly no moans and groans. I even had one student, who was repeating the same grade this year, state that "...writing is easy and fun." The students even proofread in cooperative learning groups, which seemed to take the pressure off of individuals. To be honest, cooperative learning groups were somewhat of a struggle at the beginning of the intervention. However, I did not give up. I maintained the spirit of a cheerleader and continuously tried different approaches and combinations. Each student was able to "publish" his story, which elevated the importance of writing. Then, each student entered his book in a school-wide contest. The students felt very important; they were able to perceive themselves as successful authors.

We also developed recipe books, which were given as holiday gifts. This writing activity helped expose the students to a different writing genre. Furthermore, it reinforced the issue of correct sequence as being a vital component to writing. The parents really seemed to appreciate the recipe books most because of their authenticity. The students themselves were very proud

of the finished product because of the time and effort involved in writing the recipe books. I believe, once again, the relevance involved is a key component to the success of the activity. Furthermore, the students were able to see that writing does not have to be a story or letter; writing comes in all different kinds of "packages."

Many other kinds of writing genres were used throughout the duration of the intervention. A variety of journals were used demonstrating student successes. The conclusion I see quite glaringly is the fact that if the students are able demonstrate successful writing entries, then students are feeling confident with their writing due to the abundance of writing activities practiced. Students were immersed in writing exposure and practice with relevant audiences.

Overall, I am very pleased with the impact the intervention had on my students' writing. The students are more aware of writing and all that is a part of developing a finished product. The most exciting conclusion is the fact that the students actually like to write now. Some students even choose to stay in for recess to write in journals or to word process a story. The quality of writing suggests students are developing confidence and ownership. Of course, I would like them to be doing even more with their writing. I believe setting high expectations and making appropriate adjustments as needed as a significant component to writing. I firmly believe the intervention was successful for all participating parties. As the teacher, I feel like the intervention helped me to be more focused on writing development and providing ample opportunities for students to develop their writing. I really believe the key to successful writing is exposure and practice. It makes sense to address the natural way students learn through trial and error. The old adage is "Practice makes perfect," which I believe to be true to writing development. Another positive side effect of the intervention was the development of student reflecting. Even after we "published" our products during sharing time, the students discussed possible editions and changes. Whereas, at the beginning of the intervention students thought

that once they wrote something on paper, they never had to look at it again. Student awareness of the writing process is a valuable indicator of how the intervention has positively affected student writing.

Of course, there are some changes and editions I think may help another teacher when attempting this writing intervention. For example, establishing appropriate social skills early on and maintaining them throughout the duration of the intervention is an integral component to the success of the intervention. I would definitely put more emphasis on developing social skills when faced with a challenging group of students who basically do not like each other. Without social skills, any type of collaboration will be a waste of time.

Another crucial issue I would like to address is evaluating student writing. I feel like a lot of the intervention was subjectively evaluated; whereas, next time I would develop scoring rubrics prior to beginning the action research. As a suggestion, it would be most helpful to the researchers to have an assessment course prior to embarking on a research project. Then researchers could use the knowledge gained to help develop some authentic assessment pieces to support the action research. Developing authentic scoring rubrics would provide the objectivity missing from the intervention. Furthermore, the data collected could easily be transferred into graph form. I think the impact of the intervention would be more significant

Site C Classroom C

With research objectives in mind, I feel somewhat discouraged. Initially, based on the comparison of pre and postintervention data from the targeted students and their parents, the results do not appear to be as positive as at the other sites. A more thorough analysis, however, provides beneficial information. It is a bit disheartening to see that some students who once believed that their friends viewed them to be very good writers prior to the research intervention no longer have that same opinion. It is good to see that a smalier percentage of the students now

think that their peers view them as poor writers. Neutral responses such as *a good writer* and *an OK writer* were chosen more at the conclusion of the intervention than at the preintervention stage. This leads me to conclude that the students are more cognizant of the qualities that good writer possess. The lack of this awareness during the preintervention stage probably caused some of the students to over estimate their friends' perceptions of their writing abilities. I think that the decrease in the extreme responses is optimistic because it shows that the students' opinions at the end of the intervention were not as severe.

According to the parents' responses, their children are sharing less after the intervention than at the onset of the intervention. One variable to consider when drawing conclusions about Site C's results is the fact that the participants at this site are high school age students who stereotypically do not think it is "cool" to talk to their parents about anything, let alone writing. I assert that the age of the students has a lot to do with the parent and student responses regarding how often writing activities are shared at home. Additional information provided by parents includes their responses to whether their child likes to write. According to the data at the conclusion of the intervention, fewer parents think their children like to write at the conclusion of the intervention. I think that this reflects the fact that some students felt like they were being asked to write too often. On one of the reflections the students completed following a meeting with their pen pals, one student's response was that while she liked writing with her pen pals; she wanted to do other activities with them that did not involve writing. Even though the students enjoy working with the third graders, they want to do other types of activities. I genuinely believe that some of the students felt inundated with the abundance of writing tasks. The decrease in positive responses very well may be a symptom of this writing overload.

The most successful part of the intervention has been the pen pal program with the third grade students from Site A- Classroom A. The program continues even though the intervention

is officially over. The high school students look forward to receiving letters from their pen pals. After sending their letters, they want immediate responses. "Do you have letters from our pen pals today?" is a frequent question asked in my classroom. Their disappointment was obvious when the letters did not arrive as promptly as they would like. Many of the students shared a special bond with their pen pals. Several of the high school students have exchanged home addresses with their pen pals to enable them to continue to write even when the school year concludes. Some of the students went above and beyond the call of typical pen pal duty by sending special treats and birthday cards to their third grade pals. The times when the two groups of students are able to get together in person are especially enjoyable. The students look forward to those activities. Some of the other students in my other English classes who did not participate in pen pal activities often tell me that they want to have pen pals too. They see and hear about the activities that the other students are doing and feel that they have been left out of something fun. While the primary purpose of engaging the students in written correspondence is to affect writing motivation, another result seems to be the most positive and possibly the most important result. My high school special education students show excitement and enthusiasm toward working with the younger students. I genuinely believe that working with the third graders makes them feel good about themselves. On one of the pen pal reflections, students were asked to complete the sentence, "Working with my pen pal made me feel_____?" Overall, the responses are positive. Some of their responses include, "happy," "cool," "good," and "great." There is one negative response. One student wrote that working with his pen pal made him feel "stupid." After working with two of his pen pals, one high school student responded that the activity made him feel "tired." This information suggests that a majority of the students feel important knowing that someone else is looking up to them.

One interesting contradiction which has arisen during pen pal activities is the ability of the high school students to zero in on errors in letters from their pen pals. They have little difficulty finding mistakes in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and form when they are contained in someone else's product. Unfortunately, these skills do not seem as prominent when proofreading their own products. This tells me that, while they possess valuable skills, they do not always effectively transfer it to their own daily writing.

Conversation journals perform a monumental role. They are the means by which I gain insightful information about my students. At the beginning of journal writing students did not know what to write. At the end of the intervention, however, students knew what to write. The length of some students' entries appear to have increased. I recall several instances when I had to delay moving on to another planned activity because students were not finished writing in their journals.

I do consider the intervention to be successful. I can see a difference in some of my students. Overall, I feel that a few factors contributed to the outcome of this intervention. One of those factors is the age of the targeted students at Site C. Since they are older, their attitudes about writing are more defined than those of younger students. It is, therefore, more difficult and challenging to alter the attitudes and perceptions of older students. Even though I had great expectations when the intervention started, I feel that is unlikely that this amount of time can significantly influence long formed attitudes. I also believe that the research results were impacted by the fact that the targeted students at this site have diagnosed disabilities. These are high school students who have experienced many years of frustration when attempting academic tasks such as writing. For most of them, their previous educational experiences in the area of writing do not include an abundance of success. Those memories may be more powerful than what they learned and accomplished during the twelve-week intervention. Observation of the

students indicates that targeted students who exhibited higher motivation and better work ethics towards academic tasks at the onset of the intervention seem to have embraced the intervention. I believe that students who are more disciplined showed more growth and achieved greater success during this intervention. It seems to have built on intrinsic motivation that some students already possessed.

A longer intervention time is more appropriate for high school age students. The benefits are two fold: One advantage is that it enables the researcher to spread activities out more so than with a shorter intervention time. Students would, perhaps, not feel as overwhelmed with so many writing activities. In addition, there would be adequate time to accomplish more of the desired activities. For example, I regret not having enough time to complete the autobiography projects with my students during the actual intervention. Since the conclusion of the intervention, students have completed the activity which included working with their parents to complete questionnaires about the day of their birth.

There are some suggestions related to the pen pal program. While the program was effective, there are some aspects I would do differently. Due to the fact that there are an uneven number of students at Site C compared to Site A- Classroom A, some of the older students were asked to correspond with more than one student. Due to the amount of writing and editing, it was more difficult for students with multiple pen pals to keep up with their correspondence. When the two groups of students met in person, those students were kept extremely busy helping their pen pals. A more effective strategy would be to assign only one pen pal to each student whenever possible. Another suggestion regarding the pen pal program is to give the older students more opportunities to practice assisting others with writing tasks prior to working with the pen pals. During the writing sessions with the third graders, some of the older students offered too much assistance. They seemed unsure of how to guide the younger students without

being too helpful. In contrast, a few of the older students did not give enough assistance. These difficulties may be alleviated by demonstrating good peer-editing qualities through modeling and offering the older students adequate practice prior to the genuine editing sessions.

In retrospect, I would take a different approach to conversation journals. It is difficult to keep up with the "conversation" when all of the students write on the same days. The return time on getting them back to the students is sometimes not as prompt as the students and would like. In addition to having some planned writing days, I would recommend allowing students to choose when to make an entry. If they have the power of choosing when to make an entry, they most likely would be writing when they have something to write about. It would be advantageous for the researcher because there would be fewer journals to respond to on a given day. A more individualized approach to this activity, therefore, would be more profitable.

While there is some documented success with the targeted high school age students who participated in this study, I feel that more success can be achieved if children are given these types of writing experiences at an earlier age. Children's attitudes and habits regarding the people, tasks, and activities around them form at an early stage. This includes how they feel about writing. Therefore, their thoughts and feelings about writing are more difficult to convert once they have progressed through the educational system.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers agree student attitudes towards writing is an elusive and innate aspect to objectively evaluate. We know our students' attitudes have positively changed (see Figure 2); however, it is difficult to display the impact. We suggest using a weekly student self-evaluation rubric to closely monitor student feelings about writing. Then the students could share their thoughts and impressions collaboratively to create open dialogue about writing. Student writing

would be taken to a higher level of learning incorporating metacognitive thinking, teaching students to be intrinsically motivated.

Another recommendation we believe to be a key component to the success of the intervention is the use of graphic organizers during writing tasks. The researchers assert that student writing was most influenced through the use of graphic organizers. Exposing students to an abundance of user friendly graphic organizers provide students with the "training wheels" to writing. Student writing is often stifled due to the time spent waiting for an idea to fall from the sky. Teaching students the planning and organizing stage is the foundation to building any writing product. The researchers suggest using graphic organizers daily to allow students the opportunity to become familiar with this writing tool.

The researchers also agree students showed an increase of organizational skills in writing tasks because of the time dedicated to implementing graphic organizers into the writing curriculum. We strongly suggest spending time in the planning and organizing stage of writing because the quality of student writing is significantly increased. We agree the lack of time in a school year is an on-going battle. However, we believe time well-spent is worth the end result.

Finally, the researchers agree wholeheartedly students transferred the relevance of writing tasks to real life through the use of writing to a pen pal. Student enthusiasm was most prevalent during this segment of the intervention. We highly recommend implementing a pen pal program when attempting this intervention. The researchers believe student writing became intrinsic due to having a relevant, real life audience. Students were more motivated to write because writing to a pen pal was more meaningful than writing to a pretend audience. Furthermore, students were given the opportunity to see a written form of communication. Providing students with opportunities to write to a relevant audience allows for transfer of learned skills into real-life writing tasks.

Overall, the researchers are extremely pleased with the impact on student writing at all three sites. The data supports the positive impact that the intervention had on increasing student motivation. Most importantly, student and parent dialogue about writing seems to have increased through the course of the intervention. Unfortunately, objectively measuring the effectiveness of student motivation to write is difficult to gauge. The researchers believe observations of student enthusiasm to write was the most exciting component of the intervention. The students' desire to write more because of the intervention is one more positive aspect. The researchers remain hopeful about student desire to write at the conclusion of this intervention. Who knows? A future J.K. Rowling may evolve from this intervention.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Name _____

WHAT DO *YOU* THINK ABOUT WRITING?

Sample #1: I am in _____.

- O First grade
- O Second grade
- O Third grade
- O 9-12 grade

Sample #2: I am a _____.

- O boy
- O girl

---

1. I would like for my teacher to let us write STORIES _____.

- O every day
- O almost every day
- O once in a while
- O never

---

2. I would like for my teacher to let us write REPORTS _____.

- O every day
- O almost every day
- O once in a while
- O never

---

3. I share what I write with my classmates.

- O I never do this.
- O I almost never do this.
- O I do this some of the time.
- O I do this a lot.

From Motivating to Write Profile
Codling & Gambrell (1997)

4. Writing STORIES is something I like to do _____.

- O often
- O sometimes
- O not very often
- O never

5. Writing REPORTS is something I like to do _____.

- O often
- O sometimes
- O not very often
- O never

6. Knowing how to write well is _____.

- O not important
- O kind of important
- O important
- O very important

7. People who write a lot are _____.

- O very interesting
- O interesting
- O not very interesting
- O boring

8. I share what I write with my family.

- O I never do this.
- O I almost never do this.
- O I do this some of the time.
- O I do this a lot.

From Motivating to Write Profile
Codling & Gambrell (1997)

9. Other people in my house _____.

- O spend a lot of time writing
- O spend some of the time writing
- O almost never write
- O never write

10. When I grow up I think I will spend _____.

- O none of my time writing
- O very little of my time writing
- O some of my time writing
- O a lot of my time writing

11. I save the things I write.

- O Always
- O Usually
- O Sometimes
- O Never

12. I think writing STORIES is _____.

- O a boring way to spend time
- O an OK way to spend time
- O an interesting way to spend time
- O a great way to spend time

13. I think writing REPORTS is _____.

- O a boring way to spend time
- O an OK way to spend time
- O an interesting way to spend time
- O a great way to spend time

From Motivating to Write Profile
Codling & Gambrell (1997)

Appendix B

Name _____

HOW DO YOU *FEEL* ABOUT YOUR WRITING?

Sample #1: I am in _____.

- O First grade
- O Second grade
- O Third grade
- O 9-12 grade

Sample #2: I am a _____.

- O boy
- O girl

---

1. My friends think I am _____.

- O a very good writer
- O a good writer
- O an OK writer
- O a poor writer

---

2. When I write STORIES, I feel _____.

- O very pleased about what I write
- O pleased about what I write
- O OK about what I write
- O unhappy about what I write

---

3. When I write REPORTS, I feel _____.

- O very pleased about what I write
- O pleased about what I write
- O OK about what I write
- O unhappy about what I write

From Motivating to Write Profile
Coding & Gambrell (1997)

4. I like to read what I write to others.

- O Almost never
- O Sometimes
- O Almost always
- O Always

5. When I write STORIES, I think I am _____.

- O a poor author
- O an OK author
- O a good author
- O a very good author

6. When I write REPORTS, I think I am _____.

- O a poor author
- O an OK author
- O a good author
- O a very good author

7. When I don't know what to write about, I _____.

- O almost always get an idea on my own
- O sometimes get an idea on my own
- O almost never get an idea on my own
- O never get an idea on my own

8. The STORIES I write are usually _____.

- O very good
- O good
- O OK
- O poor

From Motivating to Write Profile
Codling & Gambrell (1997)

9. The REPORTS I write are usually _____.

- O very interesting
- O interesting
- O OK
- O boring

10. What others think about my writing is important to me.

- O Always
- O Almost always
- O Sometimes
- O Almost never

11. Writing STORIES is _____.

- O very easy for me
- O kind of easy for me
- O kind of hard for me
- O very hard for me

12. Writing REPORTS is _____.

- O very easy for me
- O kind of easy for me
- O kind of hard for me
- O very hard for me

13. Check *all* the items below that you did ***this week***.

_____	wrote a story	_____	wrote a report
_____	wrote a play	_____	wrote notes
_____	wrote a poem	_____	wrote messages
_____	wrote a letter	_____	wrote a list
_____	wrote for fun	_____	wrote in my journal or diary

14. I write something _____.

- C everyday
- O almost every day
- O once in a while
- O hardly ever

15. If your teacher said that you could choose to do one of the following in the next 20 minutes, which ***one*** would you choose? Check only ***one*** thing below.

____ write a letter

____ write a poem

____ write a list

____ write in your journal

____ write a message or a note

____ write in your diary

____ write a story

____ write a report

____ write a paragraph

____ write a play

____ write study notes

From Motivating to Write Profile
Codling & Gambrell (1997)

Appendix C

Pre-Intervention
Parent Survey

Circle your answer

1. How would you rate your child's writing ability?

   A. Excellent

   B. Good for age/grade level

   C. Slightly below grade level

   D. Very poor

2. How often do you read your child's writing samples?

   A. Daily

   B. Several times a week

   C. Once a week

   D. Never

3. How often does your child tell you about a writing activity he/she has done at school?

   A. Daily

   B. Several times a week

   C. Once a week

   D. Never

4. Does your child like to write?

   A. Yes

   B. No

5. Does your child write at home?

   A. Yes

   B. No

6. If yes, how often?

   A. Daily

   B. Several times a week

   C. Once a week

   D. Only when required by homework

7. Does your child see the importance of writing in everyday life?

   A. Yes

   B. No

8. How important is it for your child to learn how to be an effective writer?

   A. Very important

   B. Somewhat important

   C. Not at all

Thanks for your time and effort. If you have any ideas or suggestions please write them on the back.

Appendix D

Teacher Survey

Grade/Subject_____ How long have you been teaching?_____

1. How often are your class writing topics teacher selected?

Never Sometimes Usually Always

2. Check any formal training you have had in the writing process.

____Undergraduate course(s) ____County Workshops

____Graduate course(s) ____Other-please specify

_____

3. How would you rate *your* knowledge of teaching writing (or writing instructions)?

Excellent Good Satisfactory Needs Improvement

4. Do you share the writing YOU do with your students?

Yes No

5. How often do your students write at a computer?

Never 1-2 days a week 3-4 days a week Every Day

6. How often does your writing program include the following ***teacher*** activities? Circle your answer.

	Never	Sometimes	Usually	Always
a. Mini-Lessons	1	2	3	4
b. Written Feedback about students' Work	1	2	3	4
c. Teacher/Student Conferences	1	2	3	4

7. How often does your writing program include the following ***student*** activities? Circle your answer.

	Never	Sometimes	Usually	Always
a. Brainstorm Ideas	1	2	3	4
b. Persuasive Writing	1	2	3	4
c. Report Writing	1	2	3	4
d. Creative Writing	1	2	3	4
e. Journals	1	2	3	4
f. Peer Conferences	1	2	3	4
g. Revision	1	2	3	4
h. Read their writing aloud to others	1	2	3	4

Appendix E

Saint Xavier University
Letter to Inform Parents of Program
Increasing Students' Motivation to Write by
Enhancing Student Self-Perception, Utilizing Collaboration, Modeling and Relevance

Dear Parents,

As a part of the master's program for Saint Xavier University I am conducting an action research project with my students. I have chosen to develop a plan to enhance students' writing achievement. This supports our district's goal of improving writing scores at the district level.

This program will be used by all students in my class this year, and the results will be recorded in my research study. Confidentiality of student performance will be maintained. If you choose not to allow your child to participate in the research study his/her results will not be used in the report. Names will not be used in the report. Your choice not to participate will not affect your child's grade.

I am excited about this program because I feel through this action research I will be providing ample opportunities to develop your child's writing. Written language is another form of communication that is a life long skill that will be required in all future professional choices.

If you have any questions concerning this project please contact me at

Sincerely,

(Please return the signed consent form below.)

I understand the information on this consent form. I understand that all of the information used will be completely confidential. I give my permission for my child to participate in the writing research action project and for his/her results to be used in the report.

Student's name:_____

_____

Parent's/Guardian's signature Date

Appendix F

Post-Intervention
Parent Survey

Circle your answer

1. How would you rate your child's writing ability?

   A. Excellent

   B. Good for age/grade level

   C. Slightly below grade level

   D. Very poor

2. How often do you read your child's writing samples?

   A. Daily

   B. Several times a week

   C. Once a week

   D. Never

3. How often does your child tell you about a writing activity he/she has done at school?

   A. Daily

   B. Several times a week

   C. Once a week

   D. Never

4. Does your child like to write?

   A. Yes

   B. No

5. Does your child write at home?

   A. Yes

   B. No

6. If yes, how often?

   A. Daily

   B. Several times a week

   C. Once a week

   D. Only when required by homework

7. Does your child see the importance of writing in everyday life?

   A. Yes

   B. No

8. How important is it for your child to learn how to be an effective writer?

   A. Very important

   B. Somewhat important

   C. Not at all

9. Do you think your child's motivation to write has increased due to the interventions.

   A. Yes

   B. No

Thanks for your time and effort. If you have any ideas or suggestions please write them on the back.

Appendix G

Name_____

Pen Pal's
Name_____

Pen Pal Activity Reflection

1. What did you enjoy about today's activity?

2. What did you not like about the activity?

3. If you could change anything about the activity, what would it be?

4. Did you feel prepared to help your pen pal? If not, explain why.

5. Tell me about some of the revisions you helped your pen pal do.

Appendix H

Pen Pal Activity
11-16-00

What did you like about the activity & why?

What didn't you like about the activity & why?

Working with my pen pal made me feel_____?

Tell me two ways you helped your pen pal.

What suggestions do you have for future activities?

Appendix I

Saint Xavier University
Letter to Inform Parents of Program
Increasing Students' Motivation to Write by
Enhancing Student Self-Perception, Utilizing Collaboration, Modeling and Relevance

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This program will be used by all students in my class this year, and the results will be recorded in my research study. Confidentiality of student performance will be maintained. If you choose not to allow your child to participate in the research study his/her results will not be used in the report. Names will not be used in the report. Your choice not to participate will not affect your child's grade.

I am excited about this program because I feel through this action research I will be providing ample opportunities to develop your child's writing. Written language is another form of communication that is a life long skill that will be required in all future professional choices.

If you have any questions concerning this project please contact me at_____.

Sincerely,

(Please return the signed consent form below.)

I understand the information on this consent form. I understand that all of the information used will be completely confidential. I give my permission for my child to participate in the writing research action project and for his/her results to be used in the report.

Student's name:_____

Parent's/Guardian's signature Date

BEST COPY AVAILABLE